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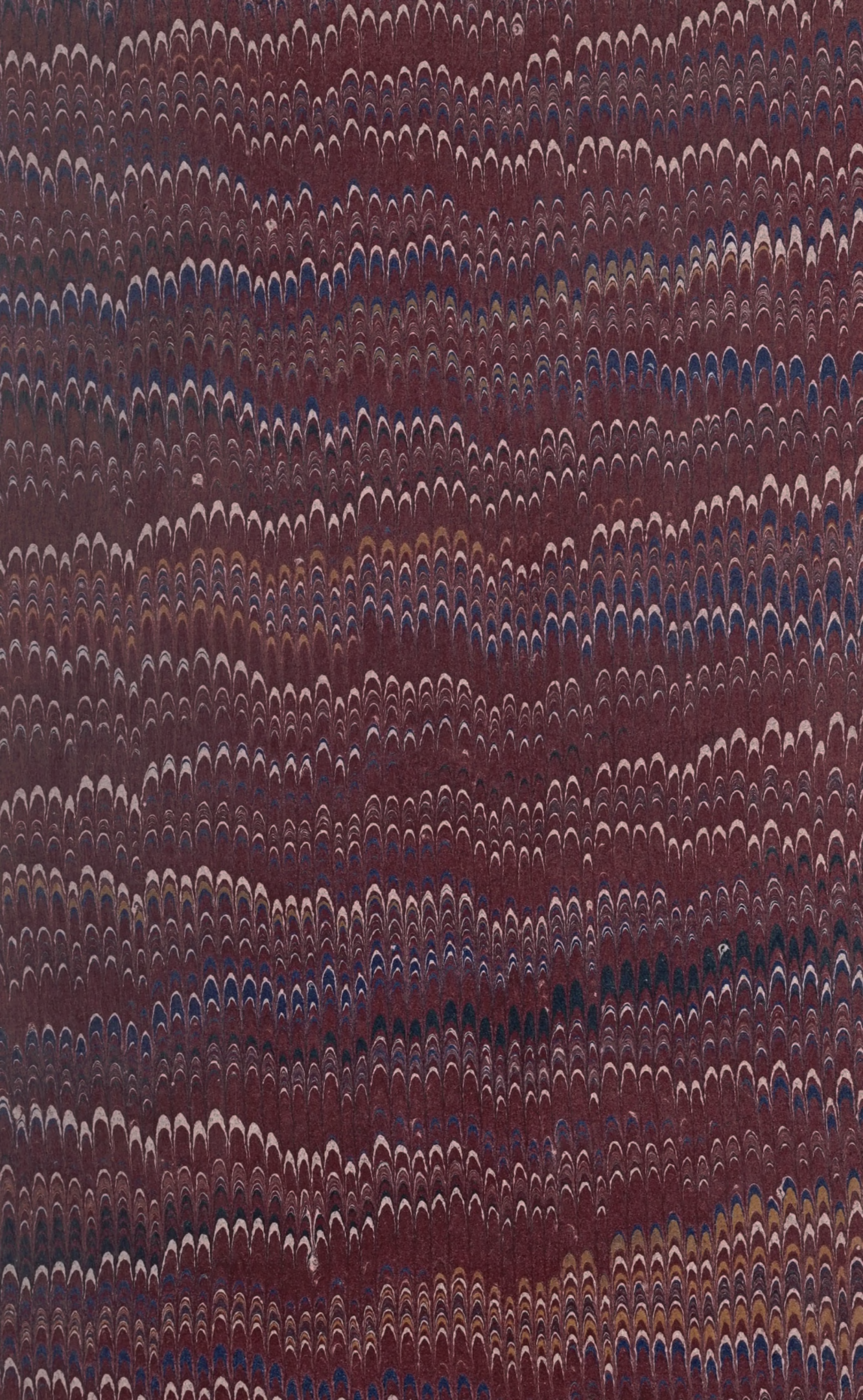

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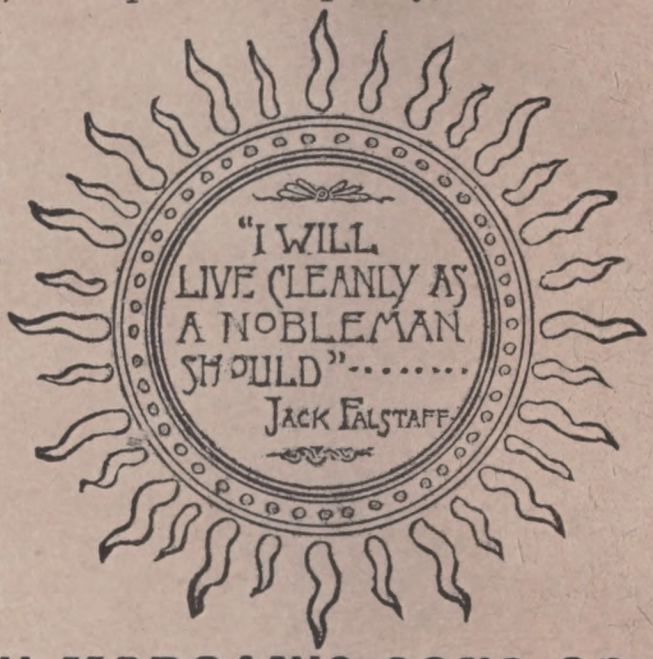

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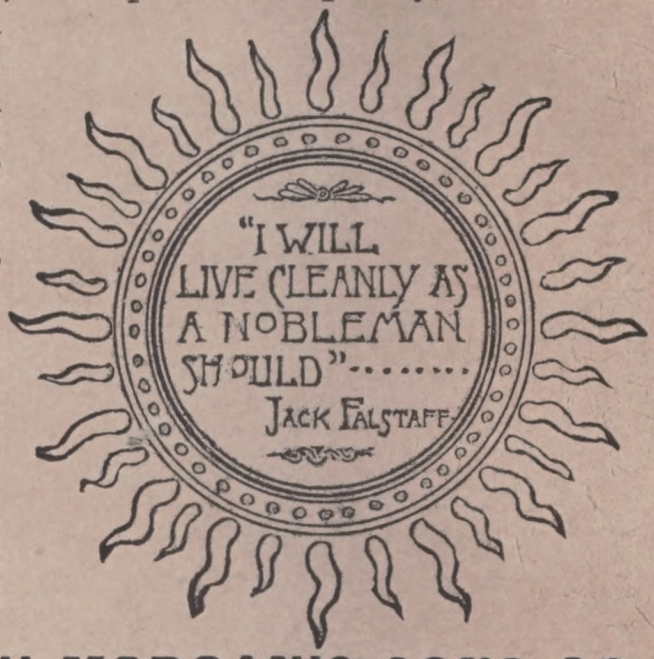

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MRS. GREGORY

BY

AGNES RAY,

Mrs. Elizabeth Dunstar (Bedell) Benjamin

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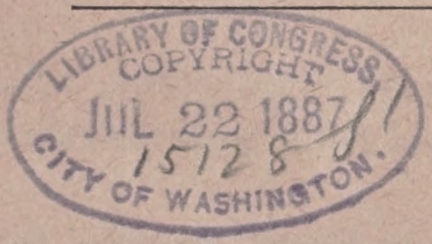

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MRS. GREGORY.

CHAPTER I.

"THE northwest suite, Mrs. Deems," said the butler, as he opened the door of the house-keeper's room, "if you please, is to be in horder for the hexpress punctilliously."

"And suppose I don't please," replied the stately person addressed, "what then?"

"Hit must be in horder just the same, honly in that case Miss Mary and I must see to it," and he bowed with a comical look to a young girl seated by the window.

"You need not trouble yourself, Mr. Podgson, but as you are here, you may as well tell me who is coming."

"The hayer, to be sure, young Master Mason, the Colonel's nevvy. Heverything must be spick and span for 'im."

"I'm happy to say my department needs no improvement. I'm always ready for inspection."

"Hexactly, and mine being the same, I have time to waste in talking."

"I beg you will waste no more here," exclaimed Mrs. Deems, catching Mary in a glance at the butler, who was rather disposed to flirtations, of a mild type, with

the young women in process of being turned into useful housemaids by Mrs. Deems.

This transformation was the good housekeeper's strong point; but Mr. Podgson was a thorn in her side. She could not leave the room for five minutes, without finding that he had invaded it during her absence, and left some mysterious influence that showed its power in various airs and graces on the part of the young girl whose duty it was to sit quietly and sew, and to be impassive and demure. He was particularly troublesome since Mary was taken in training. Much time did Mrs. Deems devote fruitlessly to a consideration of the subject. She had her own reasons for not offending the high official, who knew everything, and heard everything, and who made regular reports of the table talk for her especial edification, but, all the same she was rigid on the proprieties.

"Come to me the very minit you finish that tablecloth, Mary Spencer. If you waste time talking to Mr. Podgson, you shan't have your evenin' out."

"Yes, um," says Mary demurely. Mary really intended to obey, but in this strange world when the doors are closed on temptations they come in at the windows. This case was no exception, for no sooner had Mrs. Deems emphasized her words by her decisive way of closing the door, than Mr. Podgson who had prudently disappeared, made a leap to the window-sill from outside, close beside the object of his admiration.

"Gracious goodness! however did you get there, Mr. Podgson. I declare you are the tryin'est man."

"Now, my dear, none of that. I am possessed with a hardent admiration for you, and think nothing of climbing walls, and storming battlements for your sake."

"Lor, how beautiful you do talk. It can't do no hurt to listen while I sew."

"Not at all. The danger will be mine. I will watch the gleam of the needle, and the waves of color chasing each hother over the lily-white calm of your face."

Mr. Podgson got his metaphors a little mixed now and then, but to Mary his words were all poetry, and naturally she turned her face a little more to the light.

"You make such a shadder, I 'ave to turn so that I can see," she explained.

"Yes, my dear, and so that I can see also. I happreciate the self-habnegation."

The butler contemplated the young girl with a faint idea that sometime he must settle down into a married man. But, alas! he well knew that there were disadvantages in the married state. No matter how lovely a Mary might enter it, she would indubitably go out of it old, and red, and frowsy, whereas in his present situation, there was a constant succession of beautiful beings haunting Mrs. Deems' rooms, all of whom seemed highly honored by his attentions.

"William, the dog cart to meet the hexpress," he called, as the passing of one of the stable boys reminded him of this necessity.

"Yessir! 'Spose King Charles will do. Lady Jane's legs is jest bound up."

"The Colonel is very choice of his nevvy, so don t run no risks. Did you speak, my dear?" turning to Mary.

"Yes, I did. You oughtn't to be a settin' there jes' where the boys can see you."

"The happarition of William was hunexpected, but I will come in if you wish."

"Lor no! For goodness sake do keep still. Tell me why Master Mason haint never been 'ere before?"

"It 'as took the Colonel sometime to forgive his sister for marryin' the boy's father; Miss Nora was his

honly sister. While he was in Hindia she married a Hamerican artist, who was 'ere a paintin' for the Colonel. Mrs. Deems and a governess had charge of Miss Nora, she and the Colonel being horphans, so to speak. There were no trouble till the hartist came, I told Mrs. Deems that Koopid was 'round, but before we knew where we were they were both gone. We were frightened out of our lives. My hair began to turn gray then and there, but bless you, while we were wonderin' what to do, in she walked as cool as snow. 'Send up Mrs. Deems,' Podgson, says she. When Mrs. Deems went up, she hinformed her she was married to Mr. Mason, and hordered dinner for them two jest as composed as you please. Mrs. Deems was struck all on a heap, and none of us knew what to do. 'Owever, Mrs. Mason made no hexplanations, she dismissed the governess and had about as much henjoyment as could be put in the time between writin' to the Colonel and 'aving his answer. One day his letter came; that very hafternoon Mr. and Mrs. Mason were off, bag and baggage. They went to the Hamericas."

"Where is they, Mr. Podgson?"

"The Hamericas is hilands in the western part of the Hatlantic Ocean; they are sometimes called Hinjies, from the hinjians who infest them."

"Lor! how much you do know."

"Yes, my dear, I have hendeavored to learn the geography of this planet," modestly replied Mr. Podgson.

"Was her 'usband white like us?"

"Not like us my dear, no Hamerican is like an Hinglishman, though all I have seen are, so to speak, whitish. A colony from Hingland was once sent out to populate these hilands and they hintermarried with the hingians, which in centuries produced a whitish race."

"Wasn't there a war or something?"

"'Ardly a war. A few regiments were sent out to defend the colony. There was no trouble, the hingians was soon subdued, and now the colony is supported by raising cotton. Try and remember all this, my dear; it is an 'umble hoffering on the halter of your heddication."

"Thank you, Mr. Podgson, I know its a privilege to 'ear you talk."

"*Mary!*"

"Lor, I must go—how'd the nevvy get here?" she asked as she folded her work.

"His mother and father died, and the Colonel sent for the boy, and put 'im to school—run my dear!" Another imperious call alarmed Mr. Podgson, and Mary ran, managing to be in time to appease the wrath of the housekeeper, who was red and weary with the weight of her cares and of the linen.

"Here, Mary, carry this pile straight ahead; don't you know the northwest room?"

Mary did not dare to say what she knew or did not know, but fortunately managed to navigate into the right corner, where several rooms were in process of preparation. Another girl was dusting, but was promptly dismissed.

"Of all stupid creatures, that Sally does beat. Take hold, Mary, take off the covers. I'll see to the bed. I declare that last lavender was strong—it scents everything. Poor boy, with no parents. Well, it don't seem most twenty years since his mother was dancing about here."

"He can dance about now, I suppose," said Mary, "there's room enough?"

"That depends," said Mrs. Deems. "There's never room enough unless people is pleasant, and there's no knowing how the Colonel will take to him; but that's

neither here nor there; you mind your own affairs, Mary Spencer, that's all you have to do."

The rooms were soon made attractive and the women disappeared, just before the dog-cart drove up to the door. The Colonel welcomed the boy warmly, according to his wont when pleasurably excited. The loneliness of his home had become a burden to him, and after refusing for years to see his nephew, he suddenly decided to ignore the American father, and see if there might be enough of his sister's attractions in her son, to make him a congenial companion.

Henry Mason's story can be told in a few words. Left an orphan at an early age, he gladly obeyed the summons to come to England. His uncle's lawyer met him on his arrival. He was kind to him, showed him London, gave him money, and then took him to a bright and pleasant school among the green hills and valleys of Devonshire. Five other boys were there, all actively engaged in playing, studying, and fighting. This last experience being considered necessary to the full development of a perfect John Bull. Mr. Stepney was the head of the educational department, while his kind wife made the boys as happy as was possible during their hours of leisure. There was one daughter of the house, who was eight years old when Henry Mason joined the family circle; he and she grew up as brother and sister. The other boys left one after another, but the orphan boy remained, Mr. Stepney having been requested to look after him until Colonel Henderson returned from India. After his return he expressed no wish to see his nephew, and might have almost forgotten him had not the school been broken up by the death of Mr. Stepney.

The widow, with Nettie the elder daughter, and two

young children, was obliged to seek another residence, leaving Henry a second time homeless.

The young American was not deficient in spirit, but was advised by his friend, the lawyer, to be patient, and to trust his uncle for his future. Patience with this mysterious relative, to whom he was already so much indebted, was rendered difficult by a very common occurrence.

The necessity of separation revealed to Henry and Nettie that the brotherly and sisterly relation had vanished, and that they were desperately in love, and that life offered no attractions unless they were together, and—and—all that sort of thing. This discovery was rather startling; while it sent one of the young people away with a joyousness she scarcely comprehended, it nearly drove the other one to desperation.

He wrote to his uncle, suggesting the advisability of some occupation. There was no answer except through the lawyer, who inclosed money and directions to travel. He travelled to see his lady love to begin with, and then went to the continent, where he passed two very profitable years. He saw everything, and did everything, and became an adept in writing love-letters. Then he took his fate in his own hands, determined to return to America, and work for his daily bread, unless his uncle would find occupation for him. He longed to have a home to offer those he loved. His letter was answered by an invitation to visit "The Oaks," with a promise of a decision on future plans. Joyfully he answered the summons, giving only one day to the beloved Nettie and to Mrs. Stepney, whom he called mother, not in anticipation, but from gratitude and love. The family were living in the outskirts of London, in very plain lodgings, although their good landlady called her house a "villa." Henry's visit so

brightened and cheered Mrs. Stepney, who had been for some years an invalid, that he did not realize how ill she really was, and the day was as bright to him as its sunlight, and one long remembered for its unbroken happiness.

The following day he pursued his journey to his uncle's residence, "The Oaks." This old homestead was in what is known as the Lake district, but will not be so accurately described that you can find it. Those who know that garden of old England, will not care to have so poor a reminder of its wonderful beauty as any description would be, and those who do not know it can gain but a faint idea even through the words of its own poets. It is a miniature Switzerland—mountains, valleys, lakes, waterfalls, and dear old England for a background to them all.

Young Mason's restless spirit was soothed as mother Nature always soothes those who love her, so that by the close of that November day he was prepared to be pleased, to be happy and to make the best of everything. The idea that he was legally the heir to the beautiful park and house which he reached at sunset, had never entered his mind. He did not know whether his uncle was young or old, whether he might marry or not; in truth his thoughts were so full of "mother and Nettie" that there was room for little else.

His reception was all he could wish for. His uncle gave him a hearty welcome, and acted as if he had known him all his life. Mr. Podgson, immaculate in broadcloth and fine linen, adopted him at once, and as soon as they were beyond the Colonel's power of hearing, he told him of the childhood and youth of his beautiful mother; how he had waited upon her, and that the rooms to which he could not deny himself the pleasure of "hintroducing 'im" were those she "hoccu-

pied until she decided to reside in the Hamericas." Her sudden flight with her artist husband was prudently omitted.

The rooms looked out on Windermere. The sloping lawn did not quite reach the lake, although from the window it appeared much nearer than it really was. The stately trees, true lords of England's soil, cast long shadows on the velvet turf, and that peculiar repose of the intense greenness entered Henry's soul.

Then came to him a temporary pause in the life-struggle, and a wish that such rest and peace might last forever. This is a curious effect of that unbroken color, it seems to lead the mind to—is it to the "green hill far away?" certainly to some vision of peace.

He wondered why his mother left her home, why any one could leave a scene so beautiful, and then according to the way that life is planned, his reveries and the glamour to which he was yielding were brought to a sudden end by the summons to dinner.

He joined his uncle, who led him to a small room, which he said he preferred to the large dining hall, and where what seemed to Henry a sumptuous meal was prepared for them.

Dinner passed in peace. The uncle was good-natured, the nephew bright and entertaining. He was firmer than quite suited the Colonel about the amount of wine he drank, "but that nonsense will soon wear off," thought the old soldier, so he told his Indian stories and enjoyed them as he always did, and congratulated himself on having so intelligent a listener. Finally he made a proposition for the future, and it was exactly what his nephew wished, at least as far as he could see. He invited him to remain at "The Oaks" as long as he pleased, then promised to obtain a situation for him on one of the Western railways "in the

States," where he could work himself into independence. "This will be your home, you know, my boy, and if I am too lonely without you I may ask you to give up your fortune-hunting and come back to me, but I discovered your independent spirit in your letters, and in fact, I have already made arrangements, and will give you a letter to a firm in Chicago whenever you wish to go. It is already written." Nothing could be more delightful. There was present separation from Nettie, to be sure, but youth and hope bridged that over; it would not be long, and this jolly old uncle was making up for his oddities with a rapidity that nearly took his nephew's breath away.

He ached in every limb from sitting three mortal hours at the table, but there was immense compensation in having a future all planned for him, with a possible sprinkling of gold-dust over it, for certainly his uncle had always been liberal and probably would continue to be. He expressed his gratitude, and so far everything had a very promising aspect. When his uncle rose from the table, he put his arm confidingly in his nephew's, and the two disappeared behind the portiere. Of course I did not hear the conversation, but Mr. Podgson did, for he took a great interest in the "hayer," as he called him, and feared this exceeding calm might precede a storm, therefore he lingered near the curtains and was in consequence able to tell Mrs. Deems exactly what occurred.

It was some hours after dinner when he entered the housekeeper's room, making a peculiar sign by which she understood that he wished to see her alone. Mary was without ceremony sent on an errand. For once Mr. Podgson took no notice of the coquettish little twist and flirt of her gown as she passed him. He carefully closed the door.

"Hit's all hup!" he exclaimed.

"'Up,' what's up?"

"The truth is, Mrs. Deems, the Colonel and his nevvy 'ave 'ad rather a stormy hinterview. I was hobliged to 'ear, being only divided by curtains, as you know, which is not much protection. I don't wonder at the Colonel being in a rage, so to speak, because Master Hennery was very trying, and I 'ave never found the Hinjies conducive to patient tempers."

"For goodness sake do tell me whatever was the matter?"

"The Colonel was trying to make things cheerful, and telling 'im about the meet next week, when the boy up and refused to ride to 'ounds. He hactually said it was cruel, not, 'owever, till he was, so to speak, driven to bay."

"I don't wonder the Colonel was angry. A boy like that! 'Cruel' indeed!"

"People differ, Mrs. Deems, people differ. I 'ave myself felt compassion for the poor 'unted fox. Not that I hadmire the sentiment in an Hinglish gentleman, but I'll just tell you what I did once if you will consider it in strictest confidence."

"A pack of hounds won't tare it from me."

"Once I went down to the lodge, to see the 'ounds go by. The gate was shut, the place was hunoccupied; I had nothing to do, so I waited. Soon I 'eard them coming. The poor little fox rushed under the gate, and made one leap into my harms. I did not stop to think, but made a bound into the lodge. Fortunately I 'ad been hinside and the door was open. I locked it and took the key out, I put the poor trembling creature in one of the beds. Then I listened. I did not dare to go out for fear the scent would be habout me, and I'd know 'ow it felt to be torn to bits. The 'ounds came

to a stand, they and everybody yelling. Some dogs scrambled under the gate, some over the wall, but they lost the scent. There was no one to hopen the gate and a madder set of men and dogs I 'ope I may never see. At last they went off and I went to see the little fox. It's 'eart was beating so when I took it in, that I thought it would burst, and it did, for when I went back it was dead. Died of fright I suppose. I believe I'd have died myself before I'd 'ave given it to those savage beasts."

"Your kindness does you credit, Mr. Podgson. I don't know that I ever looked at the matter from the fox point of view before, but whatever did the Colonel do to the boy?"

"I think he would like to 'ave flogged 'im, but he was trying to be pleasant, so to speak; 'owever he told 'im, he was a mean-spirited poltroon, worthy of 'is low birth."

"Good heavings!"

"He did, I hassure you. Then Master Hennery said 'that being your hopinion it will be best for me not to prolong my stay.'"

"Did I ever! He was a brave one. Whatever did the Colonel say then?"

"I don't know, for to tell the truth I left the room, not being willing to listen any longer."

Mr. Podgson at that point came so near to being discovered that he made a hasty retreat, and did not hear the Colonel's reply, which was: "You can clear out as soon as you please."

"Shall I still make use of your letter to the Chicago firm?" One thought of Nettie enabled Henry to ask this.

"Yes. This nonsense has no effect on your honesty, I suppose. I am not unjust. You will find employ-

ment, and here is one hundred pounds for your passage and outfit, and unless I change my mind it's the last I'll give you,"

"Good-by, uncle, thank you for what you have done."

"Good-by. Try and find some common-sense somewhere. Here, Podgson, somebody order the dog-cart."

CHAPTER II.

"NETTIE!"

"What, dear mamma?"

"Are you not ready to give up that embroidery? You will not receive enough for it, my child, to pay for the eyesight."

"One moment, mamma."

Ten minutes passed, the worker rose and held her work out of the window, to catch the last rays of the fast departing twilight.

"Now, dear, I really cannot see another stitch."

"Come beside me, my darling. My brave, precious child." The invalid's arms were held out, Nettie laid her head beside her mother, kissing her again and again, as the dear arms enfolded her.

"Oh my child! my child!"

"What is wrong, dear mamma, are you feeling worse to-night?"

"Not materially worse, my dear, but I must talk over our affairs once more. When will you see Henry again?"

"To-morrow, mamma; I can't fancy what has brought him back so soon. He expected to stay the week with his uncle at least, and now he has telegraphed that he is going at once to the States, and is only coming to say good-by."

"Then we can have a long talk to-day on our own affairs, for it is of no use to try to explain Henry's return. He is sure to do right, and will tell us to-morrow. Are the children asleep?"

"Yes, dear, long ago. Do begin, mamma; you make

such ominous preparations, you frighten me. What is the matter ?"

"Then listen, Nettie, and remember all I say. When your father died and after all debts were paid, we had one hundred and fifty pounds. We have lived with rigid economy. You have worked day and night. We have hoped against hope that we would hear from my sister, and that some means of relief would come."

"Yes, mamma."

"I have heard to-day. She has been dead a year. Six months ago her daughter, two years older than you, came to England to find me. She had only money enough to pay her passage. What has become of her, is the worst part of it."

"Came to us six months ago ! Where can she be ?"

"I wish I knew. In that six months we have moved three times. If she went to our old home, supposing she had money to seek for us, she would get our address to Southampton, but evidently has not been able to trace us through the last three moves. Evidently she has *not* traced us. If we advertised, where would we begin ?"

"Poor girl, where can she be ?"

"I dread to imagine the horrible possibilities of her fate. The letter to-day is from the colonel of her father's regiment. My sister and her husband both died of fever. The colonel made all the arrangements, and thought he was doing the best for the daughter by sending her to her aunt in England. Three years ago how gladly we would have received her !"

"How did the letter reach us ?"

"It has been wandering about for a long time, but has finally been delivered. I can see nothing that we can do about your cousin."

"I will ask Henry to-morrow."

"My dear child, what can he do? I suspect there has been some trouble with his uncle, and probably Henry is sent off. Those Indian officers are hot-headed, and Henry is high-spirited, and may have been in too great haste about his future plans."

"There is one comfort: Henry is sure to do right. You said so, mamma."

"He is sure to intend to do so, but his life has not prepared him to understand just such a character as I fear he found in his uncle."

"I won't look for trouble, mamma; Henry will find something to do in America. All the people there are rich. Then we will all go there and live."

"Meanwhile?" and an unmistakable sigh accompanied the question.

"Meanwhile you are to get well, and I am to support you by sewing."

"How much have you made this month?"

"One pound, eleven shillings."

"My child, how far would that go toward the support of four persons?"

"But our money, mamma?"

"We have ten pounds left."

"Mamma!!"

"Yesterday we had twenty. I paid five pounds to our landlady, and five pounds to Mr. Williams. I insisted on knowing whether he expected to do me any good, he was obliged to say he could not, I then thanked him for his kindness, paid his bill, and told him I would try to do without him. It is useless my dear, to have a physician. I must die."

"Mamma, mamma!" and Nettie burst into tears.

"My dear, tears are a luxury in which you must not indulge; your eyes are your only hope—you must not, Nettie."

The poor child with a great effort suppressed her sobs.

"Now my child, you must look this matter directly in the face: we have no means to search for your cousin, and in a short time we will have no money left. After to-morrow we will give up our second room; you will not need it when Henry has gone. I can see no farther than that. It is useless sentimentality to wish I were dead to relieve you of part of your care. Death and life are not in our hands; I must struggle with you."

"Mamma, may I tell everything to Henry?"

"Use your own judgment, Nettie; unless he can suggest some plan for us, it seems hard to add these troubles to his cares. Your sorrows weigh heavily on him, my child."

"I will get ten shillings for the cap I am embroidering."

"Every penny helps; perhaps we can find something for the children to do."

"Perhaps someone will let Willie run of errands, but Kate can only wait on you. The cap will be done to-morrow, then I have another one engaged."

Mrs. Stepney smiled lovingly on her daughter, whose spirits bounded up at the prospect of doing anything, and allowing her to talk herself into a hopeful mood the mother watched anxiously the beaming eyes. Presently she said, "I have had another letter to-day; I will give it to you to read."

Nettie took it. "Oh, mamma, I do believe it's from that tiresome old Cowell; I hope he has sent you a present."

"I could hardly accept it, if he had, and it is more probable that he asks one of me."

"We have nothing to give him——"

"'My dear and honored madam.' He *is* civil, he must want something," but her mother did not even smile. "Read on, dear," was the faint answer.

"'With much embarrassment, but with greater hope, I present myself a suppliant before you. Shall I first say why. I am, madam, an old man. I am without relatives, and with a considerable fortune.' Much the best of the two," laughed the reader. "'I am very lonely'—mamma I do believe he wants you to marry him—'I want the sweet companionship of a wife.' I told you so, mamma. 'I can offer her a home of luxury, a life of ease, the daily association with, shall I say it—a man of cultivation and refinement. In return for this, I simply ask that she be *mine*. I do not ask for love—that will come by degrees; I *know* I can inspire it.' Vain old fellow; you shan't have him, dear."

"Oh, Nettie, my darling, go on."

"'I only ask that I may hold her in possession; that I may have her beside me. See her daily, hourly—never have her absent from me. Have her for my treasured darling; every wish shall be gratified, so that she be mine."

"Mamma, is he insane; who is the 'her' and the 'she'?"

"*You*, Nettie."

"*I!*"

"Yes, my child, read on."

"Horrible"—but with a much subdued tone the young girl continued.

"Besides these offers for herself, I also, my dear madam, offer you a home—your daughter's home shall be yours. In addition, I will send the two little children to any school that you select, bearing gladly the expense of their education. I only ask the presence of your daughter to cheer my declining years. One

week I will wait, so that the length and breadth of my offer may be considered. You have seen my house and grounds. I have for several months had the services of a competent housekeeper, a maiden lady of mature years. Your daughter's only care will be your comfort and mine. Will you unite your persuasions with my proposal, and be ready to receive me on the Tuesday of next week?

"Prospectively your son,

"EDWARD G. COWELL."

At this closing sentence, Nettie, whose nervous system was worked up to its highest pitch, buried her face in her hands in a fit of hysterical laughing.

Mrs. Stepney waited, and at last said: "Well, Nettie, what do you think?"

"I think he is an old goose; be his, indeed! I'd rather beg, I'd rather starve. How Henry will laugh over it!"

"Now, Nettie, I am too tired to talk any longer; if you will read our chapter my darling, we will go to bed."

"Yes, mamma; shall I set fire to this precious document?"

"No, my dear, by no means; you said you would show it to Henry."

Nettie crumpled it in her hand, and thrust it into her pocket, with a movement of vexation, then striving to be calm, began to read. She chose the twenty-third Psalm, because it was short, and my heroine's mind was not in tune with holy things, but the "green pastures and still waters" had the usual effect. Whether from the beauty of the language, whether from the contrast of the picture to the rough ways of most lives, or whether actual spiritual influence is *inborne* to the

weary soul, has never been decided, but certain it is that they had the effect that they produce on all who believe there is a hand that directs, and that in His own good time He will lead the trusting one to peace and rest. Even Nettie put aside the picture that had so shocked her, and kissing the dear face, on which new care had left a shadow, she performed the last duties of the night. A few moments only she gazed at the starry letters in the sky, which Henry had taught her to read, and then lay down beside her mother.

Long vigil did the mother keep that night. She reviewed her own married life, in which straightened circumstances had been the only sorrow until death took from her the loving husband and father, leaving her with Nettie and two little children. The little money he left for them was lost by the failure of a bank. What was realized by the sale of all they had owned, with their own work had supported them. Mrs. Stepney sewed, and taught, and wrote, until obliged to yield to increasing illness. The medical men called it "depression of the heart." She now rarely left her bed. Nettie bravely performed every duty. Took care of her mother, of the two children, and strove to add something to the little stock of money by sewing. The children were Willy, a bright boy of eight years, and Kate, a darling baby of six. They could do nothing toward adding to the means of support. No wonder the outlook was dark to the mother. Much as she loved Henry, she found herself wishing that he was not the obstacle that prevented Nettie from accepting the offers of the rich widower who had been their neighbor before they removed to London. He had admired Nettie, had obtained an introduction to her, the children had played in his grounds, but Nettie would not notice him, and she remembered the children also dis-

liked him. "He is only eccentric," Mrs. Stepney said to herself, "his letter is all that a letter could be."

Then came the memory again of the love that made her married life such a joy. How could she wish Nettie to marry without love! It was a hard struggle. It was not hard to die, but it was hard to leave three children without a protector. The green pastures did not help her then.

All night the soft breathing of the young girl by her side was wringing her heart. Oh, why were these three helpless children in this heartless world? Who could tell her their future? Faith was as dim as the night-lamp. That little flickering thing was only bright enough, as she raised herself on one elbow, to enable her to see the sleeping girl. The mother needed but little light to show her each feature chiselled as by an artist; to see the beautiful face, that daily beamed with brightness and with tenderest affections. She shuddered. Mr. Cowell was nearly eighty. She tried to imagine herself in the same position. Mr. Cowell or starvation. Yes—for herself she infinitely preferred starvation, but her child had never known a husband's love, and there were worse horrors and deaths than starvation. Of course Nettie loved Henry, but she was young. Mrs. Stepney did not consider Henry then, and perhaps his uncle after all might make it all right—then she fell asleep.

CHAPTER III.

NETTIE was very grave in the morning. On that day she knew she must part from Henry; this alone was enough to take the color from her cheek. Besides this separation, her mother's increasing illness, with the problem how to provide her with comforts, and to support the children, pressed heavily on the young heart. The disappointment about her aunt, and the disappearance of her cousin were additional causes of anxiety. Is it wonder that the brow was clouded, and that the bright sunshine failed to warm or cheer? The offer of Mr. Cowell's heart and home was dismissed as too utterly preposterous to be for a moment thought of; the other cares were heavy enough for the day's burden. Mrs. Stepney was too weary to talk, the children went to school, and Nettie performed her usual duties in a sort of dream. After the rooms were in order, the embroidery was resumed, until the hour when she expected her lover. He came.

"My own precious Nettie!" brought color and brightness back again, for love illumines past, present, and future. "Listen a moment, Nettie, for I sail this evening, and I must tell you first why I am here. The Colonel and I did not agree; he spoke insolently of my father, and I could not remain with him. I think he at first intended to be kind, but we did not hit it off, and I decided to go at once; a steamer sails to-night from Liverpool—I have only a few hours for you, my darling."

"But, dear Henry, what are you going to do?" asked Nettie.

"I am going to New York, then to Chicago, where I am to have a railway situation. I do not know what, only that the salary will be small, and that from this day I am to have no more from my uncle. I am to work, and I am glad to do so. It will be for you, Nettie, and for mother. Now tell me exactly how you expect to live. You have been a little vague lately about your own affairs. I must know everything. If there is any trouble tell me."

"Any trouble," Nettie repeated the words to herself, as she hesitated to begin the overwhelming history of their helplessness.

"Dear Nettie, tell me," pleaded her lover.

It did not take long to give the wretched details, or to prove that in a few weeks the petty support of those hands held in his, would be all the family could depend upon. For a moment he could not speak ; the one word —starvation—seemed written in fiery letters wherever he looked. Mrs. Stepney had impressed upon Nettie the necessity of telling Henry everything. Nettie supposed this was for his advice, for young as he was, he had a grave way of considering difficulties, and an admirable judgment in their adjustment. Many times he was the only adviser of these two lonely women.

"Mamma would not tell me," said Nettie, "until she found there was nothing to hope from her sister. This is why I only now know all this."

The speaker was folded in agony in the strong arms. "Oh, my darling, my own birdie!"

"Dear Henry, I surely can make a support. I will receive ten shillings for a cap to-day."

"How long have you been working on it?"

"About five days—you know I have very little time."

"If you make one cap every five days, and work on Sundays, and the demand never fails, and your eye-

sight remains perfect, you can make seventy-three caps in a year, for which you will receive something over thirty pounds, on which board, lodging, fuel, and clothes are to be provided for four persons!"

"Yes, so I can, but you see I doubt if I will have another order; then I must go to plain sewing, for which I will not receive as much."

"Nettie—don't you see that it is impossible? You cannot do this, and it may be years before I can make enough for us all!"

But Nettie felt the present parting to be a deeper sorrow. She did not realize the position in which she was placed; she felt that if he were not going to leave her, she might work day and night.

As soon as he could control his voice to speak again he said: "You do not realize what you undertake—I would have been no better able to help if I had not had this break with the Colonel; I am glad now that not a moment will be lost. Every day is important to me. If your mother could be moved, I would say come with me."

"Oh, no, Henry, you shall have no burden like that."

"I will not take our time to talk about what is impossible. The first moment that I can be sure of even a poor support you will be safe under my care, I will persuade you even to risk that removal."

"You do not know how much worse mamma is—so much happened yesterday. That letter from India, and, oh, I forgot another perfectly absurd one that mamma said I must show to you."

She handed the crumpled ball to Henry, who, after some trouble in smoothing it out, read the plain business-like offer of the octogenarian. As he read he shuddered, and drew her closer to himself; then he threw the letter across the room.

"What do you think of that!" she said, trying to smile.

"Did your mother wish me to read it?" he asked with a trembling voice.

"I was going to destroy it, when she said 'I thought you were going to tell Henry everything,' so I kept it."

"Don't destroy it. It must be answered; the man is civil and in earnest. I believe he is a good old fellow, said to be niggardly in the extreme, but this is generous enough——"

"Don't waste time over that stupid nonsense. It is easy enough to answer. Tell me how soon I will hear from you?"

"I will write as soon as I land in New York, from there I am to go directly to Chicago. The Colonel made all arrangements handsomely. He evidently likes to give orders. I fear the salary will not amount to much, but the appointment will give me the opportunity to look about me, and perhaps in a year, my darling, I may be able to send for you. It is a long time for you to fight life's battle——"

"Don't be anxious about me. I will support all of them somehow. Then you know, Henry, our Father looks after poor people. Ask Him to help me." Henry's answer was not in faith. He knew the tribulation meted out for the world, and knew that the good suffered. Like others who are mystified at this, he put aside the why of it for the revelations of a future life, and thought more of what he could and could not do than of the care of the All-Wise. Much is promised to faith. Nettie's was that of the early teachings of her father; it was not practical. The mother's faith had almost been lost in the darkness of her sorrow; and Henry's—his could not be expressed even by the usual forms; it was hardly a hope.

"Wait for me here, Nettie; I must go and say good-by to mother."

Nettie pouted, and said she would not be shut out, but something she had never seen before was on her lover's face, and she let him close the door without remonstrance.

"Mother," whispered the young man, "you know how I love Nettie; I need not go over the story; you know I go to work for her, but she has told me all; when you are gone she has no protector; I may not be able to send or come for her for a long time; do you see any future for her?"

"None, my boy ——"

"Had you any motive in wishing me to read that letter?"

"I had."

"Oh, how can I say what you wish; how can I give up my hope!"

"Henry you are my choice for my child—but how can I die and leave her here alone? It may be years before you are able to provide for her, and during those years I shudder to think of her position. I am singularly destitute of relatives; positively there is no one to whom I can commit her. The little ones may be provided for in an orphan asylum—oh, my dear boy, can you imagine the agonies of a mother's heart? I dare not rebel against my sufferings, but my first ray of light is this letter."

Mrs. Stepney closed her eyes as she spoke, for the expression of mortal agony on the young face before her was too much to bear. He had come hopefully, not for a moment dreaming of this depth of poverty. It had been morning in his soul when he came—he felt that he would go in a darkness blacker than any night he had yet known.

"Mother—let me say it once more—you have been so good to me, I have loved you so—I who might have known no home but a school, have had my home with you—*Mother——!*" and his voice expressed a woe it was hard to endure——"Mother—I will never lose sight of Nettie; if the time ever comes that I can claim her, I will do so, meanwhile I will leave her—*free*——"

"God reward you, my boy."

There were but few more words. Henry returned to Nettie, but his face was devoid of a particle of color; his very lips white, his eyes alone retained a look of life, and they shone with unnatural brilliancy.

"I have said good-by to mother. Now, Nettie, my precious one, my darling—" and she was folded in his arms—"Have you any doubt of my love?"

"None," said Nettie, wonderingly.

"Do you know I would die for you?"

"I hope you will not."

"Oh, don't speak lightly. I am hovering over a pit of darkness—tell me, tell me, do you believe I would die for you?"

"Yes, Henry, I think you would."

"Say you are sure."

More bewildered and amazed than ever, Nettie said, "I am sure you would."

"Do you know that every thought, every hope of the future is yours? That I go for your sake, that I will work for your sake, that I will return even if I am a gray-haired man, if I cannot come before that, to claim you?"

"But, dear Henry——"

"My child, my darling, listen. Do you *know* all this?"

"Yes, yes, I do—what *do* you mean?"

"Then put your dear arms tight around me and kiss me. Oh, Nettie, Nettie!"

Then he released her.

"Nettie, we must part entirely now. I will not take your promise across the ocean with me. You are free. Not free from my love, not free from my care. I shall know whatever befalls you, but utterly free from your promise."

"But, Henry, I refuse. I will not be released."

"You cannot help it, my Nettie. I refuse to take your promise. I free you."

"What does it mean? The world will indeed be lonely now."

"It is that you may not be alone that I leave you free."

She now in her turn lost every particle of color. "You must speak more plainly, Henry," she said.

"Do you know what it is for a young girl to be alone in the world, without money or friends? Do you know to what dangers she may be exposed?"

"I do not see what can touch me. I am strong and able to work. I know I can support mamma and the children. If I fail—are there not asylums where the little ones could go for a while?"

Henry's ideas of asylums were vague; he knew something of "red tape," and that the most needy were not always those who were received in the benevolent institutions; this gave him no relief. "You *cannot* support them, Nettie. You are liable to illness, to accident, to anything. Your mother says she has no claim on anyone. You have made already so many changes that even the interest of friends cannot be yours. Mother is very ill; soon she will need your constant care; then how will you sew?"

"We will not be deserted. I am Christian enough for that. Some way of escape will come."

"Some 'way has come. The relief has been offered you."

"What *can* you mean?"

"You gave me the letter."

"Good heavens! *You* propose to me to accept *that! You! You!* Is *this* your love?"

Henry had risen, but now he trembled so that he could no longer stand; he threw himself on the sofa and buried his face in the cushion.

"Yes, *this* is my love!"

Nettie saw then the terrible conflict; saw then the agony of the young heart, but even then she knew the sacrifice she was called upon to make was greater. She was right, for she was a woman.

"Henry," she whispered, kneeling beside him, "I cannot marry that man."

"You need not tell me that you will. You can wait and think. Only, my darling, I leave you free to gain a home and a protection. If you think it is harder for you than for me, *it is not.* I tell you it is my *love* that gives me strength to do this. Never doubt it. Whatever lies in the future, one thing is certain for you. My heart will never change, and there will be a future in *some* world that we will pass together. Now I must go. I will write from Liverpool. My precious one! My Nettie——"

He was gone.

Faint, dizzy, and stunned, Nettie was alone, kneeling on the floor, her arms wildly holding the pillow on which Henry's head had rested. Two hours she remained there. Her mother listened with intensest anguish; she would not call her. She could not rise. Oh! what was her child bearing alone? The children came in.

"Why, Nettie!" exclaimed Will.

"Nettie is tayin' her payers," said Kate's little voice.

Then the sister rose. "No, children, I was crying because Henry has gone away," she said, simply.

"Where has he gone to?" asked Will.

"Gone to America."

"Oh, why didn't he take us?"

"He will send for you some day when you are older."

"I'm torry Henry has goed," lisped Kate.

"Come here, children," called their mother.

Then life began again.

CHAPTER IV.

"MAMMA, to-morrow is quarter day, and my teacher says we must have new pellin books, and here is the paper to pay," said Kate, climbing upon the bed beside her mother, while Willy at the same time presented a similar bill from his teacher.

"Yes, dear children; but I am going to give you a holiday now; Nettie," as pale as marble the young girl entered, "will you go this afternoon and tell both of the teachers that the children will be obliged to give up school now?"

Nettie gave her mother a glance of hopeless distress; then with a simple, "Yes, mamma," began the preparations for the mid-day meal.

She stopped suddenly, and went to her bedside.

"My dearest mamma, I have neglected you for a long time, forgive me, what shall I do for you?"

The dear arms were around her. "Nothing, my daughter, the less the better. I only desire to live that I may protect you."

Nettie made no answer; it was very hard for her to speak; the children fortunately filled all pauses with their merry play, and expressions of delight at their holiday.

While the dinner was being warmed, Nettie bent over her embroidery; there were no tears now; her eyes were hard and dry, and her hand was burning with fever. She finished the flower upon the cap, then carried her work to her mother for approval.

"It is very beautiful, my child; you had better take it when you go about the schools."

"Yes, mamma. Now dinner is ready, let me help you to sit up a little."

The pillows were placed so that the invalid could eat more comfortably, while the always hungry little ones dragged their chairs to the table and explained that they were "very ready." They only of the quartette seemed to be ready at all, the mother made a poor feint of eating, and Nettie did not attempt it.

"I will direct them how to clear the table; you had better go at once."

"Yes, mamma," said Nettie, in the same hapless tone. Kate looked up.

"Sister, why don't you laugh, you always laugh; don't look so, it makes me ky."

"Don't be a baby, Kate," said her brother; "Nettie can't laugh, when Henry has gone away."

"Yes," Nettie thought, "I could have laughed, and amused them if Henry had gone as I thought he would go: full of hope."

She put on her bonnet, and went on her errands. While she was gone a box arrived; it was directed to Mrs. Stepney, and opened with much delight by the children.

"Why, mamma, it's full to the top with flowers, all packed in little divisions. Oh, how lovely they are, here is a card——"

The mother read, "With the compliments of E. G. Cowell."

"Poor Nettie," she involuntarily exclaimed.

"Why, mamma?" asked Will, who heard everything.

"Nettie has too much to do, and a great deal that she does not like," she replied with rigid truth. Will looked puzzled, and being a young gentleman of a very

thoughtful turn of mind said, "She will like these flowers; I don't see what made you think of it."

"No matter now, my boy; take down the vases, and see if you and Kate can arrange them to look lovely for Nettie when she returns." This kept the children amused and interested until the return of their sister; then, as they expected, her weary look gave place to an exclamation of admiration at the superb display."

"Oh, mamma, how lovely! From whom did they come?"

"From Mr. Edward Cowell."

Not another word was spoken.

"Did you receive the cap-money?"

"Yes, mamma, ten shillings; I wish it were ten pounds. I am to make another one immediately. I arranged about the school; it is well we paid in advance."

"Yes, indeed, a bill now would indeed be a misfortune. You may go outside and play, children;" but Nettie did not seem disposed to talk. She began her second cap, working with more industry than ever.

"How long does one cap take you, dear?"

"The last took five days. I must make this one in three." Perfect quiet reigned. Mrs. Stepney was not a troublesome invalid, but, oh, how she longed to bear part of her child's burden.

"Nettie!"

"Not to-day, dear mother; we have never kept anything from each other, we never will, but not to-day."

Then the mother knew the time would come when she could help her child. The next morning brought a letter from Henry—a few lines just before sailing. Nettie did not read them to her mother then, but some time afterward she showed her what the poor boy wrote. "Nettie—Nettie—my darling, my precious child, re-

member all I told you. Naught but death can *finally* separate us, and even that will only be for a time. The present path looks dark, but I am sure of the ending. We sail in an hour, oh, my own precious one!

"My next letter will be to your mother; you know why, my darling." Yes, Nettie knew why, and when on the following day another ring at the door brought a box of carefully packed fruit to her mother, she shuddered. The children were enchanted, and were suffered to take what they would, for Nettie said she did not like the kinds of grapes, oranges, pineapples, and bananas that the box contained.

"Why, there is every kind here," said Willy, helping Kate to peel an orange. "I like peaches and nectarines better," explained Nettie. "You must take some down to Mrs. Morrison, the landlady." Both children loaded themselves with the treasures, while Nettie prepared a pine for her mother.

"He certainly is a most generous man," said Mrs. Stepney.

"I feel as if he were a cuttle fish," was the astonishing rejoinder.

"My dear child!" exclaimed her mother, but Nettie said no more, she had thrown away the last vestige of the flowers, and was much pleased with the rapid disappearance of the fruit.

The next day, as if her fancy had been consulted, the finest of hot-house peaches, and nectarines came.

"Now, Nettie, here they are; that old fellow is a brick; do take one," said Will.

"No, I am too busy."

"Sister Nettie is having a fast day," explained Kate. "She's having ever so many."

"She certainly is, she hasn't eaten a regular dinner for ever so long," said Will.

Nettie pretended not to hear; her fingers were flying. "It will be done to-morrow," she said, "then another ten shillings, and if I get another order, we shall be quite rich, mamma."

"Yes, dear. Don't stoop, Nettie, hold your work up to your eyes. Willy, my boy, bring me another peach. How refreshing they are. Nettie, these gifts ought to be acknowledged."

"I wish they could be returned."

"That is impossible; they would be spoiled; only this packing, which the gardener evidently understands, saves the bruising of the journey."

"Mamma," remarked Kate, "Mr. Cowell didn't use to be a bit kind about giving us anything when we went to play in his garden."

"Absence of motive," said Nettie.

"What do you mean, sister?"

"I can't talk, I'm too busy."

"Hand me the blotting-book Will; I will try to write," said the mother. In a few words Mrs. Stepney thanked Mr. Cowell for the fruit, and acknowledged the receipt of his letter, excusing her few words by her illness. Will and Kate were dispatched with the note to the post.

Not a word was exchanged between the mother and daughter; Nettie's needle flew.

The next day brought flowers again, which Nettie refused to touch. The afternoon saw the cap finished. She hastened to take it.

"As I promised ten shillings for it, I will give it to you," said the lady, coldly, "but if you can embroider so rapidly, it is too much. I will take another, but will only pay five."

"I cannot make one for five," said Nettie; "I have only done this one so quickly by doing very little else."

"Just as you please," said the lady, and Nettie bade her good morning.

"What success my darling?" asked her mother—she told her.

"Let it go—have you other work engaged?"

"No, mamma; I stopped at the shops, but no one wants anything——"

"We must live day by day, my child; did you arrange about giving up the room?"

Mrs. Stepney was distressed at her daughter's rigid face; she looked as if she had neither friend nor hope.

"If you can spare me, mamma, I will go out for a little."

Her mother was surprised, but something new in Nettie's manner prevented her from asking where she was going.

"I will not be long, dear," she said, as she left the room.

Nettie's errand was to obtain work. She procured some plain sewing, which was to be finished in an incredibly short time, and with surpassing neatness.

Nettie promised everything. She would have undertaken to build a cathedral, just as readily. The shopkeeper was surprised at her willingness to take the small sum offered, but Nettie had hardly heard it. It was work—work; and work of course brought money, and money she must have at all hazards. She hastened home; their few possessions from the little sitting-room were removed into the bedroom; it looked crowded and uncomfortable; Nettie did not notice it; she looked neither to the right nor the left, but walked straight to the window, and began to sew.

"My dear Nettie," exclaimed her mother, "I'm so glad you have work. I can help you with it; give me that sleeve and my basket."

"Yes, mamma," she replied, without a change of countenance or tone, but handed what was required.

"I have no time to speak; this must be done to-morrow evening."

"All that! And for what?"

Nettie named the sum.

"My child, that is preposterous, a servant would gain more."

There was no answer; the needle was doing its work like a machine. Mrs. Stepney said no more, but with her poor, feeble hands tried to help.

Nettie never looked up; hour after hour passed; presently the children came in from play, clamorous for dinner.

"Oh, Nettie, look at mamma," cried Willy; his sister started up; her mother had fainted.

Heart-stricken at her neglect, she strove to resuscitate her; Willy, of his own accord, ran for the landlady. She came to Nettie's help, and after some time Mrs. Stepney was trying to reassure her children with a smile. "Poor lady," said Mrs. Morrison. "She ought never to try to sew."

"No," whispered the invalid; "I believe my sewing days are over."

"We've had no dinner" said Willy.

"I'll get it now, children," replied Nettie; "I had to finish some work in a hurry," she explained, "and thought of nothing else." Mrs. Morrison did not express her opinion of what seemed to her great neglect, but hastened to bring up some soup to Mrs. Stepney, who needed a restorative, while Nettie set some remains of chicken before the children, with bread and butter.

"Dis is a bad dinner," said Kate.

"You always want puddings."

"Ess, puddin' and pertaters."

"Try and not want them to-day," said Nettie, in a constrained tone; "I must sew."

"Nettie," said her mother, "eat something."

"Not now, mamma; I cannot eat."

Mrs. Morrison soon came up, and Mrs. Stepney was refreshed by the warm soup. She took it as she would a medicine, not daring to give up to the weakness. She *could not* leave her children.

"Mamma, *please* speak to me if you feel faint and ill; you are my first care, but I must not raise my eyes unless it is necessary."

"Yes, my daughter; I will not faint again."

The children climbed up on the bed, and "took care of mamma," according to their lights. If they tired her a little, it was better than letting Nettie be called off. The hour came for tea. They had early dinner for the children, and tea at seven.

"Nettie!—Nettie!"

"Oh, yes; did you speak, mamma?"

"Yes, dear; stop a few moments and make us some tea; you will kill yourself if you work so constantly—do dear."

Nettie obeyed mechanically.

"I believe sister is kazy," said Kate, who had been gravely contemplating her for some time.

"She is very busy," said her mother with a ghost of a laugh. "She has to finish some work."

"Ess, but she used to sing and work."

Nettie turned her set face. "I did once," she said.

CHAPTER V.

THE two weeks of Mr. Cowell's probation were drawing to a close. Mrs. Stepney's distress and anxiety were fast depriving her of the little strength left. Nettie worked unceasingly during every hour of daylight, excepting when she was obliged to go out. After one week she became convinced that she could not support the family by this means.

She then persuaded her mother to allow her to advertise for a place for work by the day, the landlady promising, for a small consideration, to give the children their dinner, and to attend to the invalid.

Mrs. Stepney insisted on one condition, and that was, that she should read the answers to the advertisements before her daughter looked at them.

There were nine answers. Two of them only were worth consideration ; the others were burned. One of them was for a shop girl ; the other for a milliner's apprentice. Nettie answered them. Neither one offered sufficient pay to give them the barest support.

Mrs. Stepney wrote a note privately to Mr. Cowell, asking for two more weeks. The answer was a great relief to her ; he was obliged to go to Scotland on business, and would defer his visit until his return ; perhaps it would be three weeks.

When three weeks were past, Nettie made a calculation, and looked unflinchingly at her position. Their expenses, including fire, food, lights, and rent, leaving out contingencies and additions to their wardrobes,

making no provision for any extra expense in caring for her mother, with two small rooms and no sitting-room, could not be less than eight pounds a month.

She could not continue to live on as little food as she had recently allowed herself. She knew that her mother was practicing the same self-denial. Three weeks were gone.

The money now remaining, with her work, would support them for two or three months, provided her mother remained just as she then was. It was useless to contend.

No wonderful help came to them. Life just went on. The sun shone, oh, so heartlessly, Nettie thought. She was growing weary. Her eyes were losing their light, her voice had a tear in it, her step was heavy. The children were becoming restless, and growing pale. Winter was coming.

The dear, precious mother, made no complaint; if she were weary of lying in such weakness, if she wanted better nourishment, if the crowded room made it harder to breathe, she did not say so. She only followed Nettie with her eyes as she moved around, or bent over that everlasting sewing.

The fourth week of Henry's absence had begun. There would be a letter from him soon. It was preceded by one from Mr. Cowell. He would come for his answer on the Wednesday, the first week of January. He endorsed his promises as stated in his first letter.

That was all. Nettie looked for that much-abused document.

She, too, smoothed it out, and read of what was promised for her mother, and for the children.

That night she refused to read a chapter as usual, and no prayer went from the heart that saw no loving

hand. The next day she was penitent, and asked forgiveness from Him whose ways she only failed to understand. "I shall go mad if I cannot hope in God," she said to herself. That day she could not sew. She went out, and was glad of a drizzling rain, and the bare and sad-looking trees. "Anything but that pitiless light," she thought. Then came the knowledge to her, that if she became the wife of another man, there would be sin in letting Henry's image forever rise before her. "I cannot take him from my heart," she cried, "but I will not look there. The stone there will never let him rise." Then she thought of a stone at a sepulchre that was rolled away for the suffering world. "Ah, no angel comes to me," she thought. "It will be night for me till that stone is taken from my heart." The fancy of the stone too heavy to lift, took possession of her.

"I must not even try," she said. Then she read Henry's last two letters until each word was burned upon her brain. She folded them as small as possible, and tried to put them in a locket that she wore. To do so, she was obliged to tear off the margins—all but the actual writing; then she succeeded. She closed the locket. The little snap sounded to her as loud as a pistol shot. In fact she felt as if it destroyed hope and happiness. "It will never be opened again," she said. She had been wandering in one of those dreary smoky little parks by which London supplies to its suburbs a modicum of fresher air for those who have time to breathe it, and gives miserable children a glimpse of grass and trees. There was nothing cheering. The rain only drizzled in a weak, uninspiriting way.

She could bear it no longer. It was better to go home and prepare a good supper for her mother and the children. "I can only live for them; this is my

last reverie." It was Tuesday of the first week of 1859. "The Wednesday" came. The dreaded visit was preceded by the too frequent gifts of fruit and flowers. The sitting-room not being rented, a fire was lighted there, but not a word was spoken in reference to what might be. Nettie's face was flushed, her eyes were bright; she looked more lovely than ever, although she wore her oldest and least becoming gown.

"You look horrid," was Will's comment. "I hate that brown thing."

"I love it," said Nettie.

Presently the bell rang; some one entered the next room, a card was brought. "Mamma," said Nettie, "Mr. E. G. Cowell has called. I will see him."

What passed between them no one knew, excepting that Nettie promised to be his wife in three months from that day, unless she received a summons from an old friend to leave the country. She refused to give any explanation, and candidly acknowledged that she was yielding to a necessity in accepting Mr. Cowell's offer, but promised to try to be happy, and even succeeded in thanking him for his generous gifts and promises for her mother and the children.

Fortunately he had the sense not to offer any lover-like attentions, so that Nettie felt as if the matter were a business affair.

The school was talked of; he showed her the prospectus of the one to which he proposed to send the children, and asked if they could go within a week. This, he thought, would make the matter certain. Nettie consented, without thinking how it bound her. He would see her once a week, he said, and send the housekeeper to take the children to the school.

"The housekeeper, a very experienced person, will also take charge of your mother's comfort after our

marriage, as necessarily you will be unable to devote yourself exclusively to the invalid." Nettie bowed. "Good-by, my dear," finally said the old gentleman. "I do not despair of gaining your affections." He only shook hands with her, and paying no attention to her stony expression, bowed himself off.

Nettie made no preparations, nor would she discuss the subject.

After a letter was received by her mother from Henry, she prepared the children for their school, and with her mother cried for days. Henry's letter told of his safe arrival, of his journey to Chicago, of his immediate employment, of the exceedingly small salary of the first year. It was a letter of statements. Not a word of love, of hope, of anything but his wish to hear whatever Mrs. Stepney felt able to write.

Nettie's heart turned cold as she read it. "Buried," she said to herself.

Three months passed. It was April. The day came for the marriage. It was solemnized in a small chapel near their lodgings. The housekeeper, Miss Jones, came with Mr. Cowell. She was tall, with a good figure. The lower part of her face looked fresh and young; the upper half was hidden by a green shade, which she wore over her "poor, weak eyes."

She had abundant hair, which was twisted up according to a long-past fashion.

Her dress was plain in the extreme. She had a squeaky voice with a break in it. Altogether she was a very odd person. By some mystery, Mrs. Stepney fancied her, and was willing to remain under her care while Nettie went with her husband to her Hampshire home. Mrs. Stepney and her children having lived for a few months near Mr. Cowell, Nettie was familiar with the surroundings, though she had never entered the

grounds. They were extensive and well kept, a large portion being devoted to flowers, as the freshly planted beds indicated, as well as the well-filled green and hot-houses. The house was pleasant enough, but the sunshine was carefully excluded, the furniture covered with holland, the pictures with tarlatan, so that the impression on entering was that the family were absent. Nettie saw all this, but as in a dream. Mr. Cowell was much fatigued by the exertions of his wedding-day, and for a few hours his bride was left to amuse herself. One of the maids came to her and said Mr. Cowell ordered her to show Mrs. Cowell to the rooms prepared for her mother, where she could rest and dress for dinner, this meal being ordered at seven. The girl explained that Mrs. Stepney's room opened into that of Miss Jones, the housekeeper; that Mr. and Mrs. Cowell's rooms were on the other side of the house, but were not quite in order. Nettie found her mother's room very comfortable. Feeling too restless to remain there alone, Mr. Cowell being still invisible, she wandered off, and quite enjoyed a walk among the sprouting trees, till the early evening sent her back to the house. There was a fire in the dreary parlor, but no one to be seen, and not a book anywhere with which she could wile away an hour. Naturally she went to sleep. She was wakened by her husband sitting beside her, hoping she was rested, and had found everything in order in her home. He apologized for leaving her, but his habits were peculiar, and his orders in regard to her rooms had not been carried out, so that he was obliged to make changes.

"If you will come up with me now, my love, I will show you how entirely I have attended to your comfort. I have great difficulty in breathing, and occupy a room of windows which are all open day and night.

My bed is in the centre of the room, so that I can have continual supplies of fresh air. Lest you should suffer from cold, I have had a transparent curtain between your room and mine, sufficient to protect you from too much air, and yet, as I wish you to keep a lamp lighted in your room, I can see your every movement. This will in no way interfere with your freedom."

At this point he opened an immense and dreary room, with a bed directly in the middle of it.

The blast of cold air that met them on entering, nearly took Nettie's breath away, and the absurdity of it all, made it impossible for her to control her desire to laugh. In fact, her nerves had so long been on a tension, that she had an hysterical break-down.

Mr. Cowell looked on in amazement.

"My love, I pray you control yourself. To what am I indebted for this extraordinary mirth?"

"Oh, excuse me," exclaimed Nettie. "I,—I cannot help it," and she sank down on the floor, shaking with laughter, and yet, with the tears rolling down her cheeks. Mr. Cowell wisely left her, and sent the kind-hearted maid, only saying, "I fail to comprehend this, and will await you below." The girl was equal to the situation. "La, ma'am, don't take on so. He is queer; we laugh sometimes. Come, get up. I'll show you the settin' room. 'Tain't good to rile him, and he ain't used to nerves." Nettie struggled to regain her composure, though she laughed again as they passed the transparent curtain, a curious Japanese invention, and through that room to the one described as her "settin' room," where a fire and rather more comfortable arrangements gave her the first glimpse of a place where she might have peace and rest. "I am rather tired," she explained, "and that room was so comical, but I will soon be better. Can you bring me a glass of wine?"

The girl left her; presently she returned without the wine, but with Mr. Cowell's compliments, and a glass of water, of which he requested her to take a spoonful! Fortunately dinner was soon announced, and Nettie met her husband in the dining-room. "I sent you Veratrum, my love, and am glad you are better. Wine was not indicated by your symptoms. We will not refer to the extraordinary exhibition, so manifestly ill-timed. Allow me to place you at the head of my table."

Dinner refreshed the bride; her husband certainly tried to entertain her, and she endeavored to be grateful.

CHAPTER VI.

FORTUNATELY Nettie was not obliged to look, very long, for her mother's coming; in a few days she and Miss Jones arrived. The young wife tried to procure a few flowers to decorate her room, but Mr. Cowell said he did not approve of them for an invalid, and Nettie was too newly married to remonstrate, as the room was comfortably furnished with all that was necessary. When her mother glanced at the bright chintz curtains and coverings, the sofa and easy chair, she drew her daughter to her whispering, "Thank you, my darling."

The removal proved too much for the waning strength. A severe increase of illness followed it, requiring both Nettie and Miss Jones to be in constant attendance. Mr. Cowell was very considerate. He only insisted on his wife taking a drive occasionally, and provided for her a comfortable open carriage with a pair of gray horses. She always was obliged to go alone, and was limited to one hour. Mr. Cowell said that later in the season he would accompany her in his own carriage. So far this greatly dreaded husband had not proved himself impossible to live with. His eccentricities were numberless, but he rigidly kept his word, and gave his wife and her mother all he had promised. Moreover, he was absent for some weeks, so that Nettie by degrees began to hope that she would become accustomed to her life. He annoyed her, however, by perpetually sighing, and speaking of a future

in which they would be more united. As this was not the present trial, Nettie tried to forget the ominous words. Her happiness was with her mother, and many hours of restfulness were passed each day in her room. One strange thing troubled her, and yet she so reproached herself for this feeling that she asked no explanation. It was her mother's apparent affection for the extraordinary housekeeper. They talked unceasingly, they seemed to be confidential, they sometimes were evidently interrupted by Nettie's entrance. The poor child strove to overcome the painful feeling this gave her, but could not help a growing dislike to the woman who usurped her place. This feeling had but a short time to increase, for Mrs. Stepney changed for the worse very suddenly one day, and hastily sent for Nettie. Miss Jones left the room, and the mother and the daughter were alone.

"My darling I have a few last words to say. I know the parting comes to you as no new sorrow. You and I have faced that long ago. You have given me every possible comfort, do not imagine I cannot in some measure conceive at what cost to yourself, but it is a relief to know that Mr. Cowell has carefully kept every promise, he has not interfered with our being together; you have a luxurious home, the children are provided for——" here Mrs. Stepney paused—for a few moments she was unable to proceed. Nettie naturally ascribed this to emotion in speaking of the absent children; she did not know that her mother had besought Mr. Cowell to send for them that she might once more see them before she died. He refused decidedly, saying words that struck a chill to the mother's heart. The words were these: "Madam, it was not in the bond." She could not deny that she had made no stipulations in giving up her daughter. Her inexpressible relief and thankfulness

at her having a home seemed as great a blessing as she dared ask.

"I must go on, Nettie. I want you to believe that I have good reason for saying that your happiness will be increased by the companionship of Miss Jones. I have learned much of her history; promise me to keep her with you, and, if necessary, to confide in her if you are in trouble. Circumstances have rendered her peculiar, but she will be your staunch friend."

"I trust, mamma, I need never make a confidante of Mr. Cowell's housekeeper, but I will try to like her, and will believe that your advice is good. Don't waste time on her. I want you to tell me what sort of a looking girl my cousin is, and what I must do about her? Your illness and—other things—have put her out of my head."

"I have made all the inquiries that are possible, and do not think you need to do any more. She is able to communicate with her friends in India, and they have our present address, so now I have dismissed this anxiety. If you meet her accidentally you will be struck with a resemblance to me. It was very strange that you looked like my sister and her daughter like me. This was remarkable when you were children, and my sister spoke of it in her last letter. Now, my darling, a few more words for yourself. You may have trials before you, of which no foresight can tell me how to warn you. Remember trials come to all. Yours may seem harder to bear than those of others, but it will be only so in seeming. The character would be but a weak one if developed only in green pastures. Treat sorrow as a guest—it is often heaven-sent; let trial be a faithfully used discipline; do not rebel against it, but strive to gain strength in it. It was when the bottles were broken that the light shone."

"Oh, mother, mother, what a hard lesson you are teaching me to-night!"

"My child, you are one of the best nurses I have ever known; your care and thoughtfulness are perfect. Would you have learned this if I had not been ill?"

"Better not have known it, than that you should have suffered so much to teach me."

"If this were the only good from my illness you might be right——"

"*Don't*, mother, don't tell me of good from such sorrow. I see nothing but loneliness and darkness before me."

"Your heart is sad, my darling. You are holding this separation close to your eyes, so that it shuts out all light. There is light beyond. The beyond is not far. You have made a great sacrifice for me"—(Nettie had time to be thankful, her mother did not know how great.) "Make one more, my precious one, and say you 'rejoice, because I go to the Father.'"

"I cannot say that, mother. When it comes I will bear it as best I may. That is all."

"My darling, if it is permitted for me to watch over you, you may be sure I will never be far off. But there is a surer friend in the Father. Trust Him."

She was obliged to stop abruptly; the feeble beating of the heart could hardly sustain the weary body. Voice failed, and Nettie sought the usual restoratives. They gave some relief, but the last words had been spoken. That night Nettie was alone.

Everything in regard to the funeral was properly conducted. Mr. Cowell expressed no sympathy, but was not unkind. He evidently disliked anything in connection with the "dread potentate," for he left home for several days after the funeral, saying, as he bade his sad bride farewell, "Resume your colored gowns

my dear, immediately. I never permit black to be worn. Miss Jones has directions about your wardrobe. I will soon return, and then I hope to have the constant companionship of my darling, so long separated from me." Nettie was allowed no time to reply, but in great indignation turned to seek her own room. She was confronted by Miss Jones. "Can I do anything for you, Mrs. Cowell," she asked. "I am entirely under your orders now."

"Nothing," replied Nettie, turning from her, "I only wish to be alone." Miss Jones bowed and disappeared. "Alone;" it was very easy to be alone now. Nettie remained all day in her room, having her meals served to her there. All the next day, too, and then a note from Miss Jones contained the information that fearing to intrude, she took the liberty of reminding Mrs. Cowell that certain funds were in her hands for the replenishing of her wardrobe. Should the carriage be ordered, and they go out together?

Nettie wrote on the back of the note: "I decline to go. If it is necessary to take any notice of the matter, you are at liberty to attend to it. I send one of my gowns for measurements."

Miss Jones received this with an expression of pain. "The time will come, poor child, when you will need me," she thought. Then with the old brown gown as a pattern, she made the best disposition she could of the small sum left by Mr. Cowell.

Two days passed, during which, I am sorry to say, Nettie nearly cried her eyes out, and perhaps would have quite succeeded in this womanish occupation had she not heard a mysterious voice which seemed to come from a closet in her room, and which sounded like her mother speaking from a great distance. It was not loud but had a strange muffled sound. "Be-

gin to live," were the words. She distinctly heard them, there could be no mistake, although she tried to persuade herself that she fancied it. "No, that cannot be," she thought, "for I never would have thought of saying that. "Begin to live—I've lived two years in the last two days. What can it mean?" She examined the closet, she went outside and found there was no communication with any other room. Nothing could be discovered, but the interest in the matter gave a new current to her thoughts, and as preparatory to obeying this mandate, which in her heart she had no difficulty in interpreting, she looked in the glass and was very properly shocked at the swollen eyes and tousled hair, that met her glance. Nettie was perfectly neat, and always well dressed, no matter how plain a gown she wore. She did not like her looks, so she put on the only black suit she had, bathed her face and restored herself to as nearly her usual condition as possible. She had no choice; her life must be taken up and lived; she must make the best of it; perhaps she could gain influence over Mr. Cowell, and do some good with his money; she had the children to attend to, "And I wonder," she thought, "if there are not some people whom I may visit, and have a little variety." Nothing great or noble came into her mind—only the simple life of doing her duty, and of endurance. She determined to go down to dinner; perhaps Mr. Cowell might return; she had never asked, for with all her resolutions she did not want to ask anything of Miss Jones. This woman who did everything, and knew everything, although always kind and civil, seemed to be in the place that belonged to the wife. One good precaution she took: Before she left her room she kneeled down and as a little child asked to be helped and guarded. Miss Jones was in the dining-room.

She squeaked out a few kind words, said that Mr. Cowell would be home to dinner, then with a half smile added, "Won't you put something bright on? A ribbon or something; he hates black so."

Nettie was indignant, and only answered, "I prefer black." Miss Jones made no reply. In a few moments she followed Nettie, who had left the room. "I am going to the post," she said; "if you happen to have a letter for the children I will take it."

"Thank you," said Nettie, "can you wait ten minutes?"

"Certainly, I only need to be home before Mr. Cowell returns, and there is an hour yet."

Nettie rushed back to her room. The dear children indeed needed a letter; why had she not thought of them? She wrote rapidly and lovingly, and soon gave her letter to the waiting housekeeper. Accepting a kindness and thinking of someone besides herself, had done her good. She felt more cheerfully disposed toward her husband.

At last a fly from the station delivered the old man at his door. His wife received him pleasantly, and no fault could be found with his greeting.

"I am weary, my love," he said; "while I rest and prepare for dinner put on a cheerful gown, and do not annoy me again by the sight of anything so dreary as that lugubrious affair."

"But——" began Nettie.

"There, my darling, that will do. The blue one I prefer. Do not discuss the matter. You will have a half hour. Saunders," to his servant, "take my travelling-bag, order dinner at seven, bring a glass of water and a spoon to my room."

"Begin to live," rang in Nettie's ears. "It must have been imagination, but was uncommonly sensible," she

thought, "and I rather think I'll have to begin by taking off this gown." There was no help for it, and there was no doubt that an immense improvement was made in the outward appearance of our young friend. It is a pity that some other color had not been chosen to represent affliction. The spirits of many a man have been depressed by a row of black columns at his dinner-table. Mr. Cowell settled it in a summary way, not however, to be recommended to other husbands.

Dinner passed peacefully, and after it the trio gathered around the fire. Presently Nettie remarked that as Mr. Cowell was so fond of bright things she wondered why the furniture was covered with holland.

"I prefer it, my love, and regret that it does not meet with your approval. You have married an old man, my dear, who unfortunately cannot change his ways and habits."

"Holland coverings," persisted Nettie, "are not ways and habits, and I could make this room cheerful and bright."

"We will not discuss the matter, my love. Miss Jones, the chess-table. I am unequal to the style of conversation chosen by Mrs. Cowell."

Mrs. Cowell thus effectually suppressed, endeavored to interest herself in pawns and knights for the remainder of the evening. She had begun to live.

It was something cheering that the sun was coming north, and the buds had opened into leaves and flowers, and the birds had returned to their haunts, and were preparing their homes. It was some enjoyment to watch them. James, the gardener, superintended by Mr. Cowell, was rapidly planting the beds with the slips of later flowers, prepared during the winter, many of which were ready to burst into bloom as soon as the warm sun touched them. Nettie was much interested,

and would gladly have assisted, at least by arranging the colors so that the beauty of the flower-beds might equal their luxuriance. This interference was opposed by Mr. Cowell, who preferred each variety to be separate, paying no regard to anything but their rapid development. He made no explanations, but ignored his wife's suggestions until she felt herself in so uncomfortable a position that she re-entered the house, hoping to find some occupation there. Miss Jones was too good a housekeeper to need help. There were no books to be found but a few histories, a bible, an encyclopedia, and some works on gardening. Her own books were few, and already well read. There was no piano; she had no sewing, and then realized that she had no money with which she could purchase material for fancy-work, a sort of occupation which she detested, and only now thought of in desperation. She proposed driving one day, but Mr. Cowell begged her to be patient for a short time longer; his spring work was nearly completed, "and then, my darling, I will devote myself to you."

This was not exactly what Nettie needed, so she wandered about aimlessly, longing for the children, thinking of her mother, feeling strangely trammelled without exactly seeing her chains, and reproaching herself for ingratitude when she compared her present home with the crowded room from which Mr. Cowell had taken her. "And yet," she thought, "I was happier then on my saddest days, than I am now. What is the matter with me? I cannot even write cheerfully to the children."

Neither Mr. Cowell nor Miss Jones remarked upon her restlessness, but things changed.

CHAPTER VII.

One superb morning in June, Nettie felt a faint suspicion of returning interest as she looked upon the beds of bright flowers massed in pyramids of bloom, throughout the entire garden. The indignation at Mr. Cowell's indifference to her taste in the arrangement of coloring had died out. She determined no longer to neglect these brilliant gifts ; if she might not work over them she would decorate the rooms, and despite the covered furniture give cheerfulness to her home. Breakfast passed as usual ; Mr. Cowell looked pleasantly at his wife, recognizing her renewed spirits, and gallantly apologizing for an engagement of an hour, left her soon after. Miss Jones disappeared, and Nettie, finding her scissors, proceeded to prepare a surprise for her husband. She was just about to cut some of the brightest treasures, when hearing a shout, she started up. "My lady, if you please, stop, stop," and all out of breath, hardly able to speak, James reached her. Nettie looked at him in surprise.

"Excuse me, my lady, Mr. Cowell does not permit any one to cut his flowers."

"That does not apply to me, James," was the dignified response. James looked distressed. "I hope you will pardon me ; my orders are imperative, Mr. Cowell will soon return, will you kindly wait till he comes ; those flowers are for an especial purpose."

Nettie was disposed to assert her own right, but her good angel interfered, and leaving her basket and

scissors, she replied, "I am glad you told me; of course I do not wish to cut any that Mr. Cowell particularly values."

James was much relieved by this sensible position, and leaving the explanation to his master, went back to his work. Nettie found a pleasant seat in an arbor, when she feasted her eyes, and amused herself with fancying how her arrangement of the colors would have produced better effects. Her husband's voice called her. "Nettie, my darling, how lovely you look surrounded by the vines of the arbor. Is not this a beautiful sight?"

"Yes, indeed; I was just going to cut some for the house, when James begged me to wait till you came."

"Did you cut any?" he asked with an anxious tone.

"No, I waited, but I left my basket and scissors, and we will go now."

"Not quite yet, my dearest; wait till I have recovered my strength. You have married an old man, my child, and must be patient with him."

"Indeed I will," returned his wife with a fortunate spasm of gratitude.

Mr. Cowell held her hand with his usual grasp, and kindly vouchsafed an explanation on the flower question. "Those flowers, my dear wife, each represent so much money value. I am very proud of them, and they are sought for among the most aristocratic circles. Those beside which I see your basket and those murderous looking scissors, still innocent of blood-guiltiness," and he looked up for a smile at his facetiousness, "are all to be cut to-night, to be carefully packed in cotton, and to-morrow will decorate Lady Farnham's dinner-table."

"It will be an exquisite gift."

"You misunderstand me my love, I have no per-

sonal acquaintance with Lady Farnham. *I sell them to her.*"

"Sell your flowers!"

"My love, your tone is hardly civil. Shall I not do what I will with mine own?"

"I certainly cannot dispute your right to buy or sell, but I cannot fancy what pleasure there can be in this disposition of them. Why not *give* them?"

"For several reasons. First, I want the money they bring. Next, I could not take the liberty of giving flowers to persons whom I do not know. Again, I like the pleasure of knowing that my flowers are highly prized, and that they can find an entrance to circles where your old husband would not be admitted."

"How very strange!"

"Naturally, my love, you cannot quite understand and appreciate all the motives and causes that produce the results you see in me."

"You must have made a great sacrifice when you sent me so many," and a ring of irony was in the tone. She was no match, however, for her truthful lover.

"Certainly, my darling. I made very great sacrifices. I lost money and failed to fill orders, but it was indispensable. It was a means to an end. Will you complain, my precious one, that I strewed your pathway with flowers?"

"No—but that you no longer give them to me; it was a sort of deception."

"You are again venturing on the borders of incivility, my dear wife; you could then but look at them and inhale their perfume; you can do this now. I debar you from no enjoyment of them but that of cutting them. Why should you wish to destroy their lives?"

"Because that is my way of enjoying them. I love to cut them, to handle them, to arrange them——"

"You need not continue; I can readily see where we differ, and with great pain I appreciate your feeling. Now, my own darling, we will dismiss the subject. Of course I need not apprise one so well instructed as you have been, that a husband's will is paramount. I must be obeyed to the letter. Not a flower, not a leaf, dead or alive, is to be touched. I speak emphatically because I always prefer to establish certain principles; there is less difficulty to be apprehended for our after life. I made a mistake with my lost darling, and now that you have come to brighten and cheer my declining years, there must be perfect truth, full understanding between us."

"And this understanding is that I am never to act independently?" for Nettie was no coward, and was determined to face her difficulties.

"Never, I hope, my treasure. You are *mine*. We are one. I will be the helmsman. I will direct you."

Nettie shivered, at which Mr. Cowell put his arms around her and said, "You are chilled, my treasure, come out in the sunshine. The flowers I sent you but faintly figured my love. You shall have no need now for anything outside of that. My love shall shelter, protect, and surround you; now that you are alone in the world, your happiness shall more than ever be mine."

Nettie tried to find the sunshine warming and cheering; she endeavored to find comfort in this overwhelming love, but relieved when she need only take his arm and not feel his grasp, she walked with him, listening to the long histories of why this tree was placed here, why that tree was placed there, why the path turned, why he did this, that, and the other, until she was nearly frantic, for like all young people who have minds of their own, Nettie wanted to express her views and fancies; whenever she did, she was politely told she

"bordered on incivility," and yet, if she did not reply he asked if she heard? So other growths than flowers beset the path of my heroine.

"We will be troubled by very few visitors, my love. I have never cultivated social relations with our neighbors; I saw the difficulty it produced in the case of my lost darling. I doubt if you will be annoyed by any calls."

"But I like people."

"Do you, my treasure? I am so glad that my time is my own, so that I can fill any want of society you may experience. I shall rarely be obliged to leave you. We will walk, drive and read together."

"Oh, 'drive,' let us drive now," exclaimed the weary bride.

"Certainly, we will go after luncheon, your health is my first care, and perfect regularity in your hours must be regarded. We lunch at twelve."

"Do you not think one o'clock is early enough?"

"No, my darling, or I should have decided upon one o'clock. It will avoid much trouble if you will try to overcome the habit of questioning my regulations. Of course during the life of your mother I allowed every liberty, to my own extreme annoyance——"

"I regret you should have been annoyed——"

"Yes, my love, of course, but it was a means to an end. I had promised her every comfort, and I believe I kept my word."

"You did most kindly, and I am grateful," returned Nettie. She had married him for this, and for a home, why should she complain!

They went to the house where the frugal luncheon was spread. Miss Jones performed her customary duties with her customary composure. Nettie had no appetite, but endeavored to eat something, she was a

little surprised at one incident. Miss Jones asked her whether she would take tea or coffee?

"Coffee," she replied.

"No, my darling, not to-day, your hands seemed a little feverish. Weak breakfast tea, Miss Jones, for Mrs. Cowell."

Miss Jones signified her assent, but Nettie exclaimed, "I really cannot drink breakfast tea, I dislike it extremely."

"It is important to overcome that prejudice; it is better for you to-day, my dear."

We all know that the color of weak breakfast tea and of coffee are nearly the same. To Nettie's amazement her cup contained delicious coffee; she hastened to drink it without further remark.

When Mr. Cowell ordered the carriage, the servant hesitated—"The gray horses are gone, sir."

"I did not order the gray horses that I am aware of. Miss Jones, did I say gray horses?"

"I think not," replied that dignitary in her squeaky voice.

"I cannot account for your answer, Saunders. No—I wish no explanation. I ordered the carriage with the horses that are accustomed to go when I drive."

Miss Jones had an attack of coughing, for which Mr. Cowell handed her a piece of liquorice, and with which she left the room.

"Get your hat and a light shawl, my dear."

Nettie ran upstairs, rejoiced for a moment's relief. Miss Jones met her in the upper hall. "Don't betray me," she whispered. "Sometimes I can help you a little."

"Thank you," returned Nettie, rather coolly, for her ideas of dignity and propriety were somewhat disturbed even by the coffee experience, but she remem-

bered her mother's advice, "Make a friend of Miss Jones," and said no more. Her hat was soon on. She remained at her window till she heard the wheels. Then a glance at the equipage transfixed her.

The beautiful open carriage, with the handsome grays, was not there; in its place an old-fashioned, close carriage, drawn by two thin, bony, rheumatic-looking horses. At first she supposed some dilapidated visitor had come with a relic of past greatness, but no one got out, and Saunders was standing holding the open door.

A hand touched her. "My child, why are you so long? I came to seek you. A half hour is an age to be separated from you. I want you fully to comprehend, my love, that it is your presence I desire at all times. I do not wish to be separated a moment from you. I ask but little in return for my great love; will you not give me this?"

"But little!" thought Nettie, "but how can a man know what the gift of one's self is?"

She made no audible reply, only followed her master down-stairs. The old shaky carriage was entered—she would not in her poorest days have hired such a one—the horses gave a jerk, then two jerks, after which with a great effort, they walked off with their load. What a weary walk it was; very little air could enter the small windows; the road was between high hedge rows over which nothing could be seen. The heat, the dust, the rattling of the old vehicle, were dreadful.

"Would not the other carriage have been pleasanter?" asked Nettie.

"Perhaps so, my love, but it is already returned."

"To whom? how do you mean?"

"Still wearying me with questions. I trust sometime, my dear, your mind will be at rest, and I be at

liberty to interest you in higher themes than the comforts of every-day life. I really have forgotten your question."

"My question was, to whom our carriage was returned?"

"Yes, I remember. To its owner."

"Then it was not yours?"

"No. I hired it, at great and very inconvenient expense, to give your mother comfort."

"Thank you," said Nettie, by this time willing to risk an upset, so that her exasperating husband might be rolled into a ditch.

"You are quite welcome, my love; it was a means to an end. I ask your devotion in return for it."

"You shall have all I promised you," returned his wife.

"I never expected the passionate love a younger man might inspire; I asked your sweet companionship; in return, you shall share all I have."

A long silence followed this; the heat and dust increased—it was the hottest part of the day.

"Suppose we return and drive later—it is very warm."

"Very, my love, I am suffering from it, but I prefer to continue our drive, as you selected this form of amusement. I can bear it. I never drive late."

"Never in the beautiful evenings? You lose a great pleasure."

"Doubtless. You are well informed on the proper appointments of carriages, and the best hours for enjoying them. Perhaps, however, my precious one, as I have lived longer, my experience may give me different views."

"I wish I had a view of *something*," exclaimed Nettie, looking wearily at the hedges.

"I regret to be unable to content you so early in our matrimonial career. If, my love, you would cultivate serenity, you would be happier."

Nettie resigned herself to her fate; so far everything and every day had been harder to bear than the preceding. She had heard of chains ceasing to gall, when they had been worn for years. "Years!" the word fell heavily on her heart. Three hours of the close carriage, the dragging of the old horses, the dust and heat, nearly reduced the bride to despair. Her husband had finally gone to sleep—that was one comfort, but even that was modified by his heavy head resting on her shoulder. She bore it a long time, then ventured to place it on a shawl, folded as a pillow, then she put her head outside, "John, John," she whispered "go home, for heaven's sake."

The horse stopped, John climbed down, fortunately his master still slept; he looked in, then nodded significantly, and in a few minutes turned, and Nettie, rather amazed at his behavior found they were approaching her prison house.

"It always puts 'im to sleep," said Saunders, as they stopped, and he opened the door.

Nettie jumped out; leaving her husband to the care of his servant, she ran upstairs, encountered Miss Jones, and nearly knocked her down.

"Mercy," squeaked the housekeeper, "is anything amiss?"

"No, I'm only tired of the cramped position in the carriage; Mr. Cowell went to sleep, and oh, I want to fly, I'm so tired."

Miss Jones laughed; "I know all about it," she said; "did you like the hedges?"

Then Nettie remembered that it was by no means proper to discuss her husband's peculiarities, or to en-

courage the familiarity of her housekeeper, however kindly it was meant.

"The road seemed peculiarly shut in," she said; "I think the want of air affected me."

"Mr. Cowell takes that same drive every day," encouragingly said Miss Jones, who resented a little Nettie's want of confidence in her. There was no time for more, for the master of the mansion was now fully awake, as his words, heard by the two young women, proved.

"Find Mrs. Cowell, at once, Saunders, and say to her that Mr. Cowell waits her presence in the library, at the same time remind Miss Jones that it is time for tea."

Miss Jones thus reminded, went to her duties, while Mrs. Cowell, who concluded to assert herself a little, sent word to her husband that she would soon be down-stairs; she was very tired, and intended to lie down for a half hour. She had scarcely reached her sofa, when Mr. Cowell entered.

"My love, my darling, are you ill?"

"No, only tired and affected by the heat and dust; a half hour's quiet will relieve me."

"Yes, my dear, it will, I am sure; I will sit beside you, and hold your hand in mine. Your head is cool," he said, laying his hot hand upon her fair brow, and unmercifully leaving it there, while his other hand held both of hers. "There, my precious one, rest—I will have tea brought here, that I need not leave you."

"Tea is served," said Saunders.

"Order it brought here——"

"Oh, no, no," exclaimed Nettie, starting up, ready for any change, so that the hot hand could be taken from her forehead, "I prefer to go down."

"Very well," said Mr. Cowell. "Naturally I am unprepared for these sudden changes, and would prefer more serenity, but I suppose I can hardly expect *repose* in my old age," and with a sigh that seemed to come from his boots, he offered Nettie his arm, and tenderly supporting her, aided her steps as she descended the stairs. Miss Jones had drawn her green shade farther than ever over her eyes, and only the quivering of her lips revealed any emotion. Nettie thought she was laughing but was not quite sure. Again a good cup of coffee was smuggled into her tea-cup, and thankful that Mr. Cowell did not propose to feed her, Nettie drank it without observation.

"Are you becoming accustomed to breakfast tea, my love?"

"She cannot fail to like it, the way I make it," squeaked Miss Jones, saving Nettie any reply.

"I spoke to Mrs. Cowell," said the master.

"I shall *never* learn to like it," said Nettie.

"My love, avoid positive expressions, they are out of taste for so young a person."

"Mr. Selwyn," announced Saunders.

"Ah, my good friend, allow me to present you to Mrs. Cowell; she has heretofore been occupied with her invalid mother, now removed from us, by the unerring dart of death."

Mr. Selwyn bowed kindly to the lovely young bride, whose ready tears it was impossible to suppress at her husband's speech. There was a tender pity in the lawyer's look, who asked if he might have a private interview with Mr. Cowell. Mr. Cowell looked vexed but said, "Miss Jones, please walk with Mrs. Cowell a half hour. Go six times around the arbor path, then cross the bridge and return the other way."

"Yes, sir," squeaked Miss Jones.

"Isn't this lovely," exclaimed Nettie, as they went outside, "I wish Mr. Selwyn would come every day."

Miss Jones laughed, "Mr. Cowell is rather exacting," she said, "but I suppose you knew about it before you married him."

"Oh, of course," replied Nettie, hastily, still loyal to her husband. "Are we out of sight of the house here?"

"Yes; why?"

"Because I want to run, don't tell any one."

"Not I," laughed the housekeeper.

Nettie started; oh how she enjoyed it, light as a gazelle she ran, then she mounted a rock that was on the side of the path, from that she took a flying leap, then she danced, and finally rejoined the housekeeper who was shaking with laughter, as she tried to sigh, "I could run once."

"I rather think you could now."

"No, I am past that age," and the voice squeaked fearfully. "We are coming in sight of the windows now," at which Mrs. Cowell resumed her dignified demeanor until the danger was over. She diversified her "six times round" with various like performances, crossed the bridge and returned the other way, in a very satisfactory manner. Mr. Selwyn was still there. Nettie was so thoroughly refreshed, that she came in looking bright and lovely; her husband's eyes feasted on her as he gallantly placed a chair beside him, and took her hand. The lawyer was so fascinated that he invited himself to dinner. This relieved that usually grave ceremony, and as he challenged Mr. Cowell to chess after it, Nettie's duties were light. They consisted in holding, as usual, her husband's disengaged hand, and in watching the game. He asked her approval of every move, and though his opponent pleasantly remonstrated at his

hard fate in having two combatants, Mr. Cowell persisted. They kept it up till a late hour, and the lawyer took his leave.

Miss Jones came in with the bed-candles, and the weary day was over.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE next day, very much the same routine was gone through with—the same morning walk, the same intolerable drive, the same feeling of desperation—but not the relief of a walk with Miss Jones. The devoted husband took the "six times round" which Nettie found was the daily exercise at that hour. The next day and the next, then came a letter from the children.

Mr. Cowell opened it, and read it first, and then Nettie blazed with indignation as she took it from him.

"I must and will read my own letters," she exclaimed.

"My dearest love, why this unseemly anger? We are one. You are perfectly at liberty to peruse all my correspondence. The children's letter is very silly, extremely so. I shall always read all your letters before you do, and if, again, you become so unnaturally excited, I will be obliged to suppress them entirely. I cannot risk your health."

"My health was perfect before I was so watched," almost shrieked the wife.

Mr. Cowell put his hands over his ears. "My love, I have many infirmities, but deafness is not one; I must entreat more composure; really you will make a wreck of my nerves."

Nettie, with her letter in her hand, went out on the piazza; she could not help crying. Strangely, as she

reached the outside, a voice came to her, her own dear mother's voice—"poor darling, try to bear it."

She looked in every direction; it seemed to come from above her. Could it really be possible that her mother could see her trouble and sorrow! "Oh," she thought, "if she does see, she will know what I bear for her." But Nettie was constitutionally afraid of anything supernatural, and would have preferred not to be so closely cared for in both worlds.

She remembered the comfort the words had been: "I will try to watch over you, dear, you shall not be lonely;" but somehow the reality of it was uncomfortable. She opened the letter, it was short and childish.

"DARLIN' NETTIE: We are having a good time; everything is verry plessent. We studdy some, and play some. Kate is verry good, but is homsik. She cries and cries—like the cherrybim, kontinnually, and says she kounts every day to vakashun. Give my love to Mr. Cowell, your husbin; if he ain't good to you, stick pins in him.

"Send me some munny to by a kite string.

"Oh, I do so want to kiss you when it kums nite.

"Your own brother,

"WILL."

Over this Nettie cried until she could cry no more; then, remembering who paid for the education of her darlings, and thinking of the two weeks before vacation, she strove to control herself and go inside.

Miss Jones was engaged in the favorite game. "Forgive me for leaving you so long alone, but chess is my passion, and Miss Jones beguiled me. Mrs. Cowell will finish your game," said Mr. Cowell, to the housekeeper; and, glad to be saved from talking, or rather listening, Nettie took the offered place.

The game was prolonged late in the evening; then as Mr. Cowell was in a very good-humor, Nettie spoke of the letter, and of her great pleasure in receiving it, also of her tender love for the little girl so soon deprived of a mother's care, to all of which her husband gave polite attention. She then inquired which room would be most convenient for them to occupy on the coming vacation?

"Miss Jones, did you hear me say anything about those children coming here for their vacations?"

"I did not," squeaked the lady addressed.

Nettie waited a moment. Then as Mr. Cowell appeared to have dismissed the subject, she returned to it.

"They will of course come home, as there is no where else for them to go."

"Miss Jones, have I said anything about their going anywhere?"

"You have not," was the answering squeak.

At this, Nettie's anger, which had only been in temporary subjection, "went up head."

"Will you oblige me, Mr. Cowell, by addressing your replies to me. I am quite capable of comprehending them."

"My dear love, is it your voice taking that irritable tone? You have married an old man, my precious child, do not utterly destroy his nerves. Can you reduce yourself to sufficient serenity to repeat your original question in a tone to which it is possible to reply?"

Nettie was too angry to be amused, which she fancied Miss Jones was; her tell-tale mouth was twitching oddly, but the wise housekeeper did not interfere.

"I inquired which room the children would sleep in during their vacation?"

"And I reply, my dear, that they will sleep in their own room."

"Which one is that?"

"I really am unable to tell; Miss Jones accompanied them to the school, but you object to my gaining information from that lady, therefore, unless *you* ask her, I cannot—in the present weak state of my brain—imagine how we are to find out."

"Does all this circumlocution mean that you are not willing they should return here?"

"Really, my love, I am so utterly unaccustomed to being catechized that I lose the thread of the question. Even my lost darling in her most vigorous days never subjected me to similar annoyances. When may I reasonably hope your present condition will be succeeded by one of mental health?"

"When you treat me as a gentleman should."

"Take care"—sounded distinctly in the room; it was her mother's voice. "Did you speak, Miss Jones?" asked Nettie.

"I heard a voice distinctly; it was no more like mine than a strain of music is," squeaked the housekeeper.

"I also heard it," said Mr. Cowell, "perhaps it was I. I really am so bewildered I cannot tell whether I spoke or not. We will not resume this subject. My poor unfortunate wife, most earnestly I trust that I will not again witness such evident signs of mental disturbance."

Nettie was silenced; she then for the first time remembered that the first "lost darling" had ended her days in an insane asylum, and felt her only safety was in retaining perfect control of herself; this dreadful man was capable of wrecking the strongest intellect, and of outliving two "lost darlings."

The next day, Mr. Cowell proposed stopping in the village, to purchase some gifts for the children. Nettie

supposing it was intended as a mode of expressing his regret, gladly accepted the sign of reconciliation, for he had bemoaned her condition in a most alarming manner, until the hour for the drive. Accordingly they stopped at a little shop where odds and ends of everything were sold. "What shall we buy?" asked Nettie.

"Whatever you wish, my poor dear."

"First a kite-string," said the "dear," selecting a good ball of twine; the price of this was disputed so long, that Nettie's mortification prevented her proposing anything else.

"If you are incapable of choice, my love, I will decide. Sugar plums."

"Sixpence for that lot, sir."

"Too high, give me stale candies; they will make them ill under any circumstances, so stale ones are as good."

A small parcel was put up.

"Slate pencils strike me as appropriate," was the next brilliant suggestion.

As six of these delightful playthings could be furnished for a penny, they were added.

A dissected map, of which three of the pieces were lost, was purchased at half price; then a second-hand copy of "Robinson Crusoe" was found.

"They have read that," said Nettie.

"It will bear reperusal, my poor dear. Now a porte-monnaie for each one, that will do; put them in one parcel, and we will send them at once."

Nettie's cheeks were flaming, but she was afraid to say a word, the porte-monnaies were an addition of injury to insult. The parcel was sent.

"Now, my love (you do so remind me of my lost darling, to-day), those children will be quite reconciled

to passing their vacations at school. As each one comes round we will make up a similar parcel."

"When am I to see them?"

"My poor dear, try to get your mind from this habit of dwelling on one subject. Nothing more unsettles the reason."

Nettie's terror subdued her. He certainly was capable of putting her in an asylum. She must conquer herself and watch carefully.

Miss Jones awaited them, with the joyful announcement that Mr. Selwyn was in the library.

"Miss Jones, take Mrs. Cowell six times—no, four times round the arbor path, then over the bridge, and home the other way. Order some cooling drink for her on your return."

Miss Jones signified assent, and Nettie felt intensely thankful for a moment in which to collect her thoughts; presently she decided that she was no match for the old man alone, and perhaps the housekeeper could really help her.

"Miss Jones, are you my friend?"

"I am your friend," squeaked the lady.

"Your friend," said the mother's voice.

"Oh! did you hear that?"

"Yes, it sounded like an echo, a very distant one, and was a pleasant confirmation of my words," said the housekeeper.

"Mr. Cowell is so very peculiar, that I scarcely know how to act. I am constantly betrayed into saying something that annoys him, and when he assumes that pitying tone, he frightens me."

"You have need to be alarmed. I have no doubt he drove his first wife insane, and then put her in an asylum, where she died."

"It seems as if I could not bear it," returned Nettie.

"You must try not to oppose him. Could you not manage to be pleased with his arrangements?"

"What! when he reads my letters?"

"That *is* disagreeable, but he does no harm with them. One came yesterday for your mother, I can't find out what he did with it."

"I will ask him."

"That would betray me. I will ask him before you."

"Thank you. Can I manage to get the children here?"

"Not possibly; he arranged for them to pass all their vacations at school."

"Oh, my darling little Kate, I cannot live without seeing her. My poor, poor mother, how disappointed you would be!" exclaimed Nettie, whose misery made her forget her resolutions to maintain her position and her dignity.

"Perhaps there will be some change soon," replied Miss Jones.

"Some change soon," said the mother's voice.

"It is an echo," said Nettie.

"It seems so," replied her companion.

"Are your eyes weak?" asked Nettie.

"I cannot suffer them to see the light," was the reply, with a squeak that nearly destroyed Nettie's gravity.

"The condition of my voice, and of my eyes is a great source of trial to me, but I think Mr. Cowell likes me better for being peculiar, so that, as I must work for my support, I ought not to complain."

"Not at such small affairs as that," sighed Nettie.

They were obliged to return then. Lemonade was prescribed for his wife, and Mr. Cowell superintended her drinking it. Then he made her lie down, sitting beside her holding both hands, till poor Nettie thought of a galley-slave with envy.

CHAPTER IX.

MONTHS passed. The cooler weather seemed to invigorate Nettie, and the autumn cares kept Mr. Cowell occasionally away from her. Whenever he was absent Miss Jones proposed a walk, and made herself so entertaining that Nettie looked upon her few hours of freedom as a merciful boon. One day after an early dinner, during which Mr. Cowell had been unusually silent, he placed her hand in his, saying "My love, I have been very uncomfortable for some hours. Come to the Library" (this room was so called on account of its containing the Encyclopedia); "I think if you rub my foot you may relieve me. Your dear hands always soothe my suffering."

"Could not Saunders be of more service?"

"No, my poor darling. I would have had no difficulty in calling him if I had wished. I am not quite imbecile. Do not withdraw your hand," as Nettie resisted an impulse to leave him.

He laid down on the sofa, first placing a chair for his wife. "Now, my dear, I will place my foot in your lap; rub it gently; do not weary yourself; the gentle friction will relieve the nervousness. If I should doze a little do not stop. It is the continuous current, I mean the agreeable sensation that soothes me."

Controlling her distaste at this new occupation, Nettie took charge of the nervous foot. "That is delicious, my precious one, I shall soon sleep. By no means remove your hand for a moment, it would waken me."

Sleep he did, most loudly and unmusically, while Nettie rubbed and rubbed. She was tempted to rub the skin off, but being certain that she would be obliged to rub it on again, she tried to do her duty.

Presently Miss Jones looked in. As this lady's eyes were covered by her shade her mouth only betrayed her emotions, excepting a rare upturning of her nose on extreme occasions! She performed this unbecoming movement as she looked with surprise at Nettie's position, and as she entered with her lips quivering, she very needlessly stumbled over a footstool which dashed across the room as if alive, and upset a fire-screen.

"Oh, what has happened?" exclaimed Mr. Cowell; "My love, are you hurt?"

Nettie explained that Miss Jones had stumbled.

"Yes, excuse me," said that lady; "I fell over a footstool. Will you allow me to take Mrs. Cowell's place? She looks utterly exhausted."

The half aroused sleeper opened his eyes. "Yes, yes, I see; keep your hand on, my love. I prefer my wife's hand, thank you; her back is weary; place a pillow behind her, Miss Jones. Make my darling comfortable. A glass of wine, old port for her," and he was asleep again.

"Selfish old dolt," said her mother's voice, as Nettie moved to admit the pillow in her chair. She turned quickly to the housekeeper. "Did you hear anyone speak?"

"Yes, distinctly; I heard 'selfish old dolt.' Was it not you?"

"Hardly of my husband," she replied indignantly, hesitating whether to charge Miss Jones with the incivility.

"Do not talk, my love," murmured her husband. Miss Jones shrugged her shoulders, and as she turned

to leave the room said, "Will you be denied to company, madam ; I see a carriage driving in the gate ?"

"Oh, certainly ; give strict orders ; I do not know how long I may be detained."

"*Let it drop*," said her mother's voice.

Nettie shuddered, but made no comment.

Miss Jones hastily left the room, to prevent the entrance of the unusual guests.

For four weary hours the wife who had sold her liberty, held that foot ; she wanted to pinch it, to stick pins in it, to rub it with a curry-comb, but all the same she did what she conceived to be her duty. At last the roaring ceased, and her husband was fully awake.

"Thank you, my precious one ; I have had a half hour's nap. Put on my slipper again ; I would like to take your arm and walk a little."

"You have slept four hours," said Nettie, rising with difficulty.

"My love, strive to overcome your habit of exaggeration ; we will walk now." And, slightly offended, Mr. Cowell took the offered arm, and going out on the piazza, began a promenade which ended only with the last streak of daylight. "I really cannot walk any longer," said Nettie.

"My dearest love, why did you not mention your unprecedented fatigue before. Your young and vigorous life has hardly need to weary so soon, when I at nearly eighty years can still walk ; however, if I must yield to this extraordinary whim of yours—you will pardon the word—I will be obliged to forego any longer exercise ; we will send for tea, and perhaps you may recover sufficiently to play chess with me after that refreshment."

Nettie made no reply as they went in.

"Why do you not speak, my love ?"

"I am actually so tired, I did not see any necessity of reply."

"My dear, sit down ; before we ring, I must have this matter explained. You walk a short time—you complain of fatigue ; instantly, without hesitation, I consent to forego my necessary exercise, and come inside. You make no acknowledgment, and on my gentle remonstrance, you, in a most peevish voice—pardon the word—say you are too tired to see any necessity for reply. Now I will pass over your tone ; it is agonizing to my nervous system, but I will not enlarge on that ; what I wish to make clear to you is the illogical form of expression, you are 'too tired to see.' That indicates brain disturbance; probably belladonna will relieve you. Your brain was never very strong, my love ; avoid any sort of agitation, nervous excitement, weariness ; give up tea, take a warm bath, and retire early. Now ring, and remain beside me ; I must watch you more carefully, my chosen treasure. Give me your hand."

Poor Nettie was in despair ; women will understand when I say she wanted to scream ; all she could do was to hold tight to the arm of the chair with one hand, and bite her lips. How much longer she could endure it, was an unsolvable problem ; again and again she resolved not to feel, not to care, to turn herself into a machine ; the smooth-faced Saunders answered the bell.

"Bring tea, Saunders, and a glass of lemonade ; send Miss Jones."

"Did you send for me, Mr. Cowell?" asked the peculiar voice of the housekeeper.

"Yes, Miss Jones ; my wife is not well ; she has both brain and other disturbances ; she complains constantly——"

"Oh!" ejaculated Nettie.

"My love, control yourself; I regret your suffering, but really I must not be subjected to these sudden starts. You know my life hangs on a thread. What will become of you when I am gone, poor child, poor darling? To proceed, Miss Jones, with the thread of thought which my wife so uncivilly—pardon the word—interrupted, I should say, 'broke,' as I chose the figure of a 'thread,' to represent the continuous line of thought—to proceed, here is the key of my cabinet, go to the third drawer on the right hand side, you will find a box of remedies of a peculiar strength, made expressly for me by my own physician, and which I use only for myself—my wife is a part of myself, Miss Jones,—the most precious part——"

"*Stuff*," said the voice.

"Who spoke?" asked Mr. Cowell.

No one answered. "Some one spoke; I heard a sound. My love, if you are not suffering too acutely, will you oblige me by a reply?"

"I did not speak," said Nettie.

"I heard some one," said Miss Jones.

"I will investigate later. Now I wish to proceed; take from the drawer a small vial of belladonna, drop two drops in a half tumbler of distilled water—you know where to find the bottle—stir it vigorously, always the same way, lock the cabinet, and bring the medicine to my wife. I can only intrust this to you, Miss Jones; the health and happiness of that precious creature is the one thought of my existence." Miss Jones went on her errand. "Nettie, my darling, sit nearer me;" the "darling" obeyed.

"Now tell me why you interrupted when I was speaking to Miss Jones?"

"I did not," said Nettie, indignantly.

"My love, will you not try, for my sake—your poor,

suffering husband—to control your excessively plebean —pardon the word—mode of darting at me, when you speak ; also oblige me by not denying my charge—you did speak. Why do you not answer ?"

"I already told you I did not, therefore——"

"There, that will do ; don't attempt to argue, it is bad for you ; I will pardon you. Now rest until Saunders brings tea."

Nettie shut her eyes, and put her head back ; if she could have five minutes quiet, she would be able to endure it, but one minute was all she could gain. "My dear, if you can possibly sit up, I would like you to take this medicine," as the housekeeper entered with the tumbler. Nettie obediently took her dose, refusing to notice an amused look from under the green shade. She would not acknowledge her husband's absurdities to this strange woman, about whom there seemed to hang a mystery, and yet without the alleviation procured by her, what would her existence be ? Saunders brought the tea and the lemonade ; Miss Jones, as usual, handed Mr. Cowell his cup, then asked his wife what she would take. "Tea, strong," was the reply. "Pardon me, my love, I really cannot consent to such trifling with your health ; I ordered the lemonade for you, but after belladonna I fear I must ask you to forego even that. Take water to-night, my precious one." Nettie rose and poured out a glass for herself, her husband watching every movement.

"My love, we will have a game of chess now ; are you able to lift the table beside me ?"

"I will return in a moment," said Nettie, leaving the room in desperation. She was so quick that she did not hear the remonstrance, and, running to her room, threw herself on her sofa, thankful for one moment of solitude, even if an hour of covert reproaches followed it.

The clock ticked, measuring her stolen quiet, two, three, four, five minutes, then Miss Jones stood beside her, with a cup of fragrant coffee in her hand. "Take it, and come down as quickly as you can; I'll keep him amused five minutes more."

"Thank you!" exclaimed the surprised Nettie, "but——"

"No matter, just drink it; you will give out if you don't; put the cup in my room."

"*Drink it*," said her mother's voice. The housekeeper was gone, and Nettie with a half shiver and a furtive turn to look behind her, swallowed the restorative; then, fearing discovery, hastened to put the cup in the housekeeper's room, and to go down again. She was received in ominous silence; Miss Jones placed a chair beside the chess-table, on which she had been arranging the men, talking pleasantly as she did so, and Nettie, revived and determined to be in a good humor, began her game.

"One moment, if you please. I only wish to be prepared for the extraordinary mode of your proceedings. State whether you will be able to control your nervous condition sufficiently to remain seated during one game, and if not, whether you can rise quietly and *walk* out of the room. Really, my love, your inconsideration for my shattered condition fills me with amazement."

"Since the belladonna, I feel much better," returned Nettie, pleasantly, "and can play two games if you like."

"That is well; give my wife a footstool, Miss Jones, and a pillow behind her back; place the belladonna on the table, and if you will kindly take a book, and *not* rustle the leaves, we will be as comfortable as is possible for two such invalids."

"Pray don't call me an invalid," laughed Nettie, "I was only tired."

"Fatigue without cause indicates a very low state of the system. Now, my precious one, are you really going to move the Queen's pawn?"

"I really am," returned his antagonist, who would no more have dared to win the game than to have danced a minuet on the table.

She had sold herself to gain a support for her mother and the children. She had, in addition, a home, food, fire, and clothes. Why should she complain? Why is it that present sufferings so utterly annihilate the past? Why is it that we perpetually reproach ourselves for being in a position which we entered with our eyes open, and according to the light vouchsafed them? Is it because we do not trust? Nettie was young—judge her kindly.

CHAPTER X.

NETTIE'S summers and winters passed in this same dreary round. Mr. Cowell required her constant presence, sometimes to read to him, sometimes to rub him, sometimes to write for him, sometimes giving her the relaxation of a drive or a walk, but always with him. Nettie used to think of the days when a dead body was chained to a prisoner, for, to all she cared for, his life was a death. She was not permitted to see her brother and sister. Their letters were first read by Mr. Cowell, often destroyed without their being given to her. Those that she saw gave evidence of improvement. This was her only comfort. Miss Jones sometimes succeeded in taking a letter for her to the office, but when it was answered Nettie had a weary examination to bear. Several letters came from Henry to her mother, but those she never was permitted to see. Miss Jones told her of their coming. The few visits she received she was not allowed to return. She occasionally went to church, but only when Mr. Cowell could accompany her. There was no life in her life. There was no growth. It was a dwarfed, dead tree.

Yet Nettie struggled ; she tried to gain benefit from the lessons of patience and endurance. She tried to gain wisdom and consideration for others from the pain of her own sufferings. She even strove to lighten the burden that Miss Jones bore so brightly, for Miss Jones was as often trying to suppress a smile as a tear. "She can go away," thought Nettie ; "I cannot." But

Miss Jones gave no indication of being dissatisfied. Her salary was small, but, as she asked, "What do I need in this wilderness? I am alone in the world, and this is a safe home." So, though she was ever grateful for Nettie's small efforts, she really did not need help. Mr. Cowell grew visibly old. He passed his eightieth birthday, and added the festivity of one of his drives to its weary hours. When he was eighty-two, he gave up selling flowers, and the bright beds were raked over, and the conservatories sold out. Nettie missed them, but James devoted his attention to the lawns and shrubs, and their green glory refreshed her. The old horses died, and were not replaced. John was dismissed. It was a relief to be spared that form of exercise. Nettie did not feel as strong as she used to feel. She had constant headaches, and a dull, heavy weariness in her brain. She could not sleep as she once did, and in the mornings was unrefreshed. Miss Jones regarded her with anxiety, but did not know what to do, for Mr. Cowell was as exacting as ever, and she was rarely alone with his wife. The letters from Henry by degrees nearly ceased to come. One day Miss Jones recognized one; she told Nettie, and said she would try to get it for her. Nettie wondered at her own apathy about it. "Am I, too, under the stone that I placed over his love? I am glad I do not care for him now. Is my heart palsied?" She could not answer her own questions, everything seemed so unreal and dreamlike. Mr. Cowell was not unaware of the change in his young wife, and Miss Jones was doubly anxious as she saw a sort of wicked look as he watched her. "Something must be done," she said to herself; "that lovely nature and perfect physique will yield if I cannot save her." Mr. Cowell was in his eighty-third year. Nettie had borne her chains for nearly four years. It was soon after the coming of

Henry's last letter, sometime late in the winter, she had gone to bed with a headache, but was wakened suddenly from a troubled sleep by some sound. She could not tell what it was. Her husband was most unmistakably asleep, his windows and his doors wide open. She raised herself on her elbow to listen ; certainly a step in the hall ; she laid down again, and half closed her eyes to watch. A figure clothed in white, glided in. The poor child, in mortal terror of ghosts, either real or unreal, had no power to move. Lately she had heard less of her mother's voice, but this figure looked like her mother. It went to Mr. Cowell's secretary, opened it, opened one of the drawers, took out a paper then replaced it, closed the secretary, and glided out of the room again. The moment the presence was removed Nettie's courage returned, she sprang from her bed, went out into the hall, just in time to see the figure disappearing into a closet at the head of the stairs. Nettie made one bound and opened the door. There was nothing there but brooms and dust-pans. The housekeeper's door opened, and Miss Jones came out, her dressing-gown thrown around her, shading her eyes with her hand.

"What is the matter?" she exclaimed; "you will take cold ; do go back to bed."

"I heard a step, followed it here, and now it has gone."

"The step ?"

"No, the person, of course. I certainly saw someone."

"And I certainly heard someone. There is nothing here. How very odd ! This is the housemaid's closet. This old house has the reputation of being haunted ; Mr. Cowell bought it cheap in consequence."

"Oh, dear ! I wish I were dead," exclaimed Nettie.

"I no sooner think peace is coming when I am all put back again."

"Do not be frightened. I will leave my door open. I am not afraid of natural or of supernatural beings. If there is any more noise I promise you to find out what it is."

On this Nettie, shivering with cold, crept into bed again, glad that her snoring spouse had not wakened.

The next day she and Miss Jones found an opportunity of talking over their fright, but no elucidation of the mystery appeared.

A week after this, Miss Jones told Nettie that Mr. Cowell had destroyed Henry's letter, and only preserved the envelope.

"Poor mother! I wish she had it," said Nettie.

"What an idea!"

"I mean I wish she were here to get it."

"So do I. We had a most peaceful life while her sweet spirit was with us. Mr. Cowell was never so calm before."

"Nettie! where is my Nettie?"

"Here! do you want me?"

"What a strange question! Do I not always want you? and now, my poor darling, more than ever, for you are not well, and my head feels strangely. Stand behind my chair, and rub it gently with your lovely hands. Their touch is enough to bring the dead to life."

Nettie was occupied in this weary performance until she could stand no longer. As usual, her husband went to sleep, but wakened whenever she stopped, and murmured:

"Go on, my treasure."

Miss Jones quietly placed a high chair for her, and

Nettie continued her ministrations until relieved by the announcement of dinner. One peculiarity of Mr. Cowell's was to have meals at regular hours, but their character was very uncertain. Sometimes the luncheon table held the regular dinner, and tea came at dinner-time, at other times the dinner was the last meal. He was more and more restless, giving many signs of a strong constitution yielding to the weight of years of selfishness. The unselfish and kindly natures are those to whom old age comes gently. To one like Mr. Cowell, self-centred, annoyed if anyone were happy outside of the magic circle of his influence, the failing of the powers is made a burden by resistance and vexation. In one particular his strength was wonderful; it was in his watchfulness of his wife. She was less able to bear it than at first; and whether he really wished to torment her, or had some other motive, Miss Jones could not tell, but certain it was that he gave her no peace. He would hold her hand, and beg in a plaintive voice that she would control her restlessness, and let him have this little indulgence, and while apparently only wishing for quiet, would watch her as if he were trying how much she would bear. Bravely Nettie tried to endure this; it seemed a small matter, but her poor head ached so!

"Oh! do let us walk," she exclaimed one day.

"Certainly, anything for peace. My last years have a fearful burden. I never know what to expect. Miss Jones, bring Mrs. Cowell's wraps. I am anxious about her. She is never quiet a moment, and now I must be walked to my grave."

"Pray let me walk alone. Lie down; let Saunders attend to you. I, too, want peace."

Seldom Nettie opposed him; it never availed. His hands were over his ears.

"Hasten, Miss Jones; my poor darling is having a strange turn, she screams so;" and hastily rising, he took her arm and went outside, leaning so heavily upon her that she tottered, and, being unable to endure his weight, she begged to go in again. He raised his eyes, and prayed for patience.

"I am at your orders, my love; what next?"

Nettie utterly lost her self-control. She could run, he could not. She shook off his arm, and ran into the house, fairly screaming, "Let me alone! I *must*, I *must* be alone!" and rushing to her room bolted the door, and sank on her sofa. Her head was throbbing—the pain was almost unendurable. "I shall go mad," she thought; "oh, what will become of me? Mother mother, now is the time to help me."

Miss Jones was near the door; she heard the cry, but all she could do was to keep Mr. Cowell away. A sudden thought struck her. He had a pond of gold fish, that he much prized. She ran to the garden and removed a plug, which let the water out, then told James to tell Mr. Cowell.

"I can arrange it," said James.

"No, that will not do; Mr. Cowell will be very angry; I will send him out." James shrugged his shoulders, but suspected something was wrong, so he waited till the old man came to investigate this new trouble, bemoaning his hard fate as he approached. Miss Jones ran up to the door again; all was quiet, Nettie had fallen asleep. Two hours of repose in some measure restored her; she waked relieved, and went downstairs in some dread of reproof, but Mr. Cowell was interested in the difficulty of saving his fish; many had gone down the stream into which the pond drained, and many times the story was repeated, of how he contrived to have them caught, and then his wonder

of how the plug came out, till Nettie began to tire again.

At last tea came, and chess, and then the merciful release of night, but the relief and the release were only temporary.

There was no doubt that the young wife was threatened with an illness of some sort. She was flushed, her eyes sometimes heavy, sometimes unnaturally bright. She was either in the deepest depression or in the wildest spirits. When depressed, Mr. Cowell passed his time in sighing and shaking his head, when she was gay, he plaintively entreated her to remember his age and his nerves—that quiet was essential to him. One day Nettie received this with shrieks of laughter, at which Mr. Cowell, putting his hands to his ears, went to his writing-desk, and while writing, watched her in a way that gave Miss Jones the impression that he was describing her condition to some medical man. This astute person had very good reason to fear this proceeding on Mr. Cowell's part, and strove in every way to sooth and control his wife. In this she failed ; Nettie either could not or would not make any effort at composure. The revelations from her mother had ceased ; if they had not, she would have been a maniac, for they excited her fearfully. The apprehensions of Miss Jones were confirmed when one morning Mr. Cowell announced that two of his friends would dine with them, and that he wished Mrs. Cowell to be present. That day Miss Jones endeavored to keep Nettie very quiet, but in vain ; she was restless, complained of headache, and was altogether unreasonable. "We are to have two gentlemen to dinner ; I think they are medical men ; do try to seem well, for I don't think you would like such advice as Mr. Cowell would choose for you." She did not tell her of what

she most dreaded, lest the end might be precipitated, but gave a silent thanksgiving that she could watch over the unsuspecting victim.

Nettie expressed herself delighted at having "company to dinner," dressed in her brightest colors, and was radiant when she received the guests. Miss Jones was certain from their half-concealed watchfulness and Mr. Cowell's false and yet evident attempts at extreme gentleness, that Nettie's fate was sealed unless some stronger power than hers could avert it. Every possible mode of escape was presenting itself in turn to this faithful friend; she even thought of running away and hiding, but where and how. Dr. Conolly the well-known philanthropist, was visiting in the neighborhood, he was well known to Miss Jones, and to him she determined to apply that very night. This resolution gave her some comfort, so that she could give all her attention to keeping the conversation at dinner on ordinary and unexciting themes. It was of no use; every antipathy of Nettie's was brought out by Mr. Cowell. She was led to express herself strongly on all her various aversions, and sometimes pathetically, sometimes with a merry laugh, would appeal to her guests to support her position. In vain Miss Jones tried; Nettie's girlish follies were magnified, and her absurd speeches applauded, until there was no doubt in the mind of even the housekeeper that there was some serious brain-trouble. She laughed till she was exhausted, and then putting her hand to her head, rose, and asking to be excused, left the room. Miss Jones remained; she wanted to follow Nettie, but was more anxious to hear what might be said. The guests, whoever they were—they had been presented as Mr. Adam and Mr. Warren—were too acute for her. No sort of remark was made, excepting regret that Mrs.

Cowell was obliged to leave. Miss Jones had to retire at last, but in some way best known to herself, succeeded in hearing Mr. Cowell say, "My poor wife's condition is, I fear, only too evident."

"Yes, yes; there is no doubt. We can make her perfectly comfortable, perhaps cure her, but we prefer—er—er—to select our own attendant for her."

"Of course," said Mr. Cowell, "and I will make all arrangements next week, say on the Tuesday."

That was enough; Miss Jones had heard all that was necessary. They were afraid of her, and she had four days in which to save her charge, for in this light she considered Nettie ever since her mother's death.

She found the poor girl lying on her sofa, with wide, open eyes, and a burning face. A look of terror surprised her friend. "Keep them away;" whispered Nettie; "oh, they have such dreadful eyes; I nearly screamed when they looked at me."

"They shall not harm you, dear," replied Miss Jones in a low voice, her only mode, apparently, of speaking without the squeak. "Will you promise me to stay quietly here while I go out for an hour; Mr. Cowell will stay with his guests while they smoke."

Nettie promised as well as she could; she was nearly insensible from the pressure on her brain. Then, clad in garments that could not be distinguished from the night itself, Miss Jones softly left the house. She had a mile to walk, but fear was not one of her weaknesses. She safely reached the house where the great doctor and great-hearted philanthropist was visiting. "Can I see Dr. Conolly?" she asked of the astonished servant, who knew "the lady with the green shade," by sight.

"Walk in the library, and I will tell the doctor. What name, please?"

"Miss Jones, on business," was the reply.

No application ever failed to receive attention from this famous physician. His care of the insane, his home at Hanwell, were known to all.

"How can I serve you, madam?" asked the kindly voice, a soothing balm in its every tone.

For once Miss Jones lifted her green shade, and for his sake bore the light upon her "poor, weak eyes."

"You!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she replied, smiling, "accept me as I am now, for I have a sad story for you; I came as Mr. Cowell's housekeeper, *Miss Jones*."

She then told him the whole story. All about the insanity of the first wife, and the dangerous condition of the present one. All that the reader knows, and more, was revealed to the attentive listener.

"Adam and Warren, did you say? I know no such men, and I know about all who are engaged in this nefarious business."

"I think the names were assumed and, by the by," said Miss Jones, "I remember, as they were in the hall, I heard one call the other Matson."

"Matson! That will do, I know now. To-morrow I will call on Mr. Cowell—he often supplies me with flowers. Try and let me see his wife; I will give my opinion after that. We will save her; do not despair. I can frighten Matson, if I am sure of the man."

Do any of my readers know what it is to cast a burden of care upon another who is able to bear it? The relief to Miss Jones was so great that she could scarcely stand. Dr. Conolly said kindly, "Try to explain the revelations as soon as you can, and trust me."

CHAPTER XI.

When Miss Jones returned, the guests were just leaving ; a fly was at the door, and standing in the darkness she overheard the name of the station to which they were to drive. "To-morrow I will know what tickets they took," she thought. She threw off her wraps under one of the windows, and entered unperceived, just in time to answer Mr. Cowell's inquiries for her. He was very nervous and agitated, made no reference to Mrs. Cowell, but sent for his medicine-chest, and mixed a dose for himself, talking in an incoherent way all the time. "Will you rub my foot, Miss Jones?" he asked ; "it has been numb all dinner-time. I thought those men would never go."

Miss Jones rubbed the numb foot, but without giving any relief ; the numbness increased. She was totally indifferent as to whether he was numb all over or not, but was most anxious to get to Nettie. Presently Saunders appeared at the door, requesting to speak with Miss Jones.

"What is it?" she asked ; "I cannot leave Mr. Cowell."

Saunders signified by a motion that she was needed up-stairs, but only replied, "Mrs. Cowell will remain in her sitting-room to-night."

"I am glad of it," exclaimed Mr. Cowell, "I'm tired of her everlasting headaches. What do you suppose I married her for? Certainly not to be entertained by such a child. No ; I married her for her superb

health, of which I hoped to gain sufficient to keep me alive for a few years, without injuring her. I am very susceptible to magnetic influences, and believe that I receive benefit by keeping the current steadily up. All I needed was her touch, but she is so restless I could not keep her quiet. Surely it was a small favor to ask to have her hand always upon me, in return for all I have done for her. I waited till her mother died; I disposed of the children, and simply required to hold her hand, or in especial cases to have her rub me. But she has fretted and fidgeted me into the grave. She has killed me, I hate her. Call Saunders; I must go up-stairs; such a strange weakness and numbness!"

Miss Jones watched him curiously as for the first time he actually tottered. "Is retribution coming to the old wretch?" she asked of her inmost self. "Was there ever such an abominably selfish old sinner? His devotion is explained now, poor Nettie! She must be saved, whatever happens to him." The real sufferer was found to be delirious; there was no doubt of her condition now. Her head and hands were burning with fever; the housemaid was crying over her, as she piteously besought her mother to come and take her away from this dreadful place. "They have such awful eyes, oh, take me away," she pleaded.

"Yes, darling, you shall go away; no one shall trouble you any more," whispered Miss Jones; "lie quietly and trust to me." Nettie seemed to hear, and made no opposition as she was undressed and placed in a bed which they made up for her in her sitting-room; she seemed less restless, so that the housekeeper left her to see in what condition Mr. Cowell was, hoping to find him asleep, in which case she might get Dr. Conolly to see her charge. Unfortunately all the doors and windows were wide open, as usual, but she must risk

it. She heard the trembling voice faintly saying, "Rub, rub."

"Who is that?" he asked, as she passed the door.

"It is I; can I do anything for you?"

"No; I want Mrs. Cowell. She is better than the rest of you, weak as she is. Send her. Tell her she must come."

"She is too ill; her head aches severely; I have just put her in bed," replied Miss Jones, wondering at the strange expression on the old man's face.

"Nonsense, she can come well enough. She must come."

"I will send her as soon as she is able," was the firm answer as she left him, for she was well convinced that whatever might be the reason, the old tyrant was unable to rise, and there was no danger of his going to his wife.

It was very late; the hall clock was striking twelve, but she saw a light in the room over the stable where James slept, and soon ran across the lawn and roused him, telling him to go at once for Dr. Conolly. "Get him in the dining-room quietly; I will leave the hall door ajar, and will be watching. Both Mr. and Mrs. Cowell are very ill."

Saunders met her as she returned. "He is asleep," he said, "but breathes awful oneasy. Is anythink amiss with him, ma'am?"

"I do not know," she replied, "he looks very strangely. I will have a medical man soon."

"I didn't know but as his sins is proved too much for him," said Saunders, who had small respect for his master. "Them men that were here to dinner, weren't here for no good. You'd better keep a look out for our young lady."

"We must all do the best we can; I think we can save her," was the reply.

"You'll have to get supernateral sperits to help, if you're a goin to get ahead of Mr. Cowell," returned the man, as he went back to his charge.

"I *will not fear*," she said to herself. "Such a terrible thing cannot happen." But terrible things do happen, even in guarded and protected homes, and Miss Jones shivered as she pictured what might be. "I will take her away; we can hide somewhere; I know that old horror wants to get rid of her. Why did I never think of his magnetic craze? That explains his persistent devotion—only selfishness." She went to the head of the stairs to watch both the door and the patients.

Mr. Cowell slept audibly. Nettie tossed and groaned and talked to her mother, and begged to see Willy and little Kate, poor child! Willy and Kate were far away; would they be children when she saw them again! Miss Jones went to her, and she and the housemaid took turns in bathing the hot brow, watching and listening. Presently a softly opened door and a quiet step, followed by a signal from James, summoned the housekeeper. The good, tireless man, was there.

"She is very ill; wait a moment, till I listen for Mr. Cowell; he would gladly poison me if he knew of this;" and Miss Jones ventured to the door of the sleeping man. His position was peculiar, his breathing amounting to a roar. "Safe enough," she thought, Dr. Conolly was brought up-stairs; he listened a moment.

"Let me see Mr. Cowell," he said.

"Not for worlds, see her first," and he yielded.

Nettie took no notice of him, then said:

"Oh, papa, put your hand on my head, dear papa. I called and called for mamma, but she won't come;" she put out her burning hand to the good doctor.

"My little girl," he said, "I have something to give you ; take it for me."

"Yes, dear papa," she said, opening her mouth, "I'm *so* glad you are come."

Presently she began to talk to her mother again, begging her to come.

It was very sad, but Sir John knew the symptoms ; it was the delirium of brain fever, not mental derangement. "Mrs. Cowell will have a serious illness," he said ; "she must have a nurse, and be entirely removed from noise and every disturbance."

Miss Jones simply said in a low voice, "I only have till the Tuesday."

Sir John looked grave. "Do nothing more till I have seen Mr. Cowell ; I heard a peculiar sound from him ; there is something the matter."

He left the housekeeper to follow his directions in regard to Nettie, and went to the room from where a strange, suppressed roaring, proceeded. Saunders was standing beside his master, with a puzzled look.

"Somethin' strange, sir," said he, respectfully, supposing Sir John was the medical man.

"How long since he has spoken ?" he asked.

"It's nigh a 'arf hour since he spoke reg'lar, then he began that noise."

"He is partly paralyzed," was the reply ; "who is his regular attendant ? I came only to see Mrs. Cowell."

"He didn't never have none. He takes little pills, an' powders, an' mixes 'em himself. Miss Jones knows all about them."

"Try to make him swallow this ; be careful, lest he cannot swallow ; if there is difficulty, do nothing for the present. I will inquire of Miss Jones in regard to sending for some one." Sir John turned to go.

"There was some suspicious lookin' fellers here to

dinner," said Saunders, as he accompanied the physician through the hall. "What shall I do if they come again? I don't know who is the head when he an' Mrs. Cowell is both took ill."

"You can have full confidence in Miss Jones; she understands all about those men, and must for the present give directions. I will take charge of Mrs. Cowell, and will send for a medical man for Mr. Cowell," he replied.

Saunders returned to his charge, fully satisfied that whoever the strange man was, he knew what he was about, and that care and kindness and justice would be assured if he took the direction of affairs.

Jane was left in charge of Mrs. Cowell, while Sir John and Miss Jones held a conference.

"I think Mr. Cowell will die, but it may be some weeks; we will put him in the care of Martin, who knows me and to whom I will give some points. The Matson matter had better not transpire; unfortunately, Mr. Cowell may have given a permission in writing to remove Mrs. Cowell. If I were sure he had not, I would have no embarrassment, but I cannot remain longer than Monday, and she might be forcibly removed if Mr. Cowell is living on Tuesday."

Still Miss Jones looked hopeful; she was so sure that the great man would see some way of escape.

"Could we not go somewhere and hide?" she asked.

"A part of your idea has occurred to me. It would virtually be hiding, but must not be actually so. I dislike anything underhand, but while Mr. Cowell lives his written order to Matson will be in force. The fellow with him gives the medical opinion on which Matson acts. I have controverted them before this. Have you any friend living in any out-of-the-way place, where you could both be comfortable—and how about money?"

"My year's salary has just been paid; I think Mr. Cowell intended to dismiss me. This will support us until Mrs. Cowell recovers. If nothing can be done legally, and Mr. Cowell lives, I will work for her."

"You owe her some reparation," said Sir John, with a kind smile, "and I see no other way to save her."

"If she can be moved, we can go to a place where I boarded; it is near Ambleside, a quiet house; a widow lives quite alone; but she could not go as she is now."

"No, but by Monday she may be in a different condition. Write at once to your friend, post the letter yourself, have the answer sent under cover to me. We have hardly time, and I wish no one to know where she is, excepting Mr. Cowell's lawyer. Can he be trusted?"

"Yes, indeed; Selwyn, you may tell him everything; there, that is daylight, the night has past. I had better see Mr. Selwyn and arrange about leaving the house in charge of some one."

"Yes, or you remain here, and I send some one with Mrs. Cowell."

"I do not like to leave her, and yet if Mr. Cowell dies, some one ought to be here."

"We will leave this till to-morrow, in fact, it is to-day, Friday. I will see them both once more."

Nettie was more quiet, but her cries for her mother were still most piteous. "Don't talk to me any more, mamma," she said; "just come and take care of me."

Sir John glanced at Miss Jones, who looked deeply distressed.

"She will recover," he said; "but it was unfortunate. Now for Cowell."

The old man was just in the same condition. Saunders was asleep.

"He may live for weeks. I will send Martin. Now go and rest a few hours; lie down on the sofa in Mrs.

Cowell's room ; don't be anxious about her, I will return before there is any change, and I will write that letter for you ; give me the address ; keep calm, all will go well."

Miss Jones was really exhausted, and began to show signs of the mental and physical strain which her kind adviser recognized. He never wearied while his care was needed. The address was to Mrs. Woener, Ambleside.

"She is a German, and her letters are sent to Ambleside, but she rarely goes to the post. I fear she may not receive it."

"I will telegraph that a letter will explain ; that will make all sure. We must leave Sunday or Monday night. Now take your rest when you can ; I will explain more fully to-morrow."

CHAPTER XII.

THERE was quiet for some hours at the Cowell house. Saunders slept; his master was apparently unconscious; he breathed with less difficulty. Nettie sank into a sort of stupor. Miss Jones, after giving directions to Jane for the other servants, and telling her to close the house and go to bed, took Sir John's advice to rest while she could. She knew there was much trouble and anxiety before her, and that all her strength would be needed. It was the calm before the storm, but it was merciful, for sleep restored the strength of the watchers, and the sun had long been trying to enter the east rooms, before anyone roused to the cares of the day. At last Saunders waked, stiff and cold, although he had ventured to close some of the windows. Mr. Cowell was in exactly the same condition, excepting, to the horror of the man, he slowly opened his eyes. It was evidently the only motion he could make. He was entirely paralyzed. He could not move, nor speak, nor swallow.

"Well, if ever there was an old cove come up with, this ere is the one," muttered the man as he vainly tried to induce him to open his mouth to take what Sir John had left for him. There was no use in trying; the eyes opened and closed, that was all. Jane came up as Saunders stood there.

"Well of all the hawful things!" she exclaimed.

The eyes opened upon her.

"Laws a massy," she ejaculated, as she fled, "come to your breakfast. I can't stay."

"Wimmin is such cowards," said Saunders, "an I don no as I can do anythink. I may as well have my breakfast."

So Mr. Cowell was left to face his condition by himself. He probably heard all that was said, and knew exactly what had befallen him, but we will not try to follow his thoughts. He might or might not improve the time vouchsafed him. Let us hope he did.

Miss Jones waked, as Jane, who had come up very carefully, rushed back again to the safe shelter of the kitchen, where all the events of the day and night were thoroughly discussed, including the visit of Messrs. Adam & Co.

James explained that the strange gentleman who was so kind was Sir John Conolly, a friend of Miss Jones, by which discovery Miss Jones reached an unexpected altitude in the respect of the servants, with whom she was always popular.

"He is a visitin' over at the Perrys, an' I went after him after Mr. Cowell was took ill. He an' she 'll take care of 'em, I warrant. Sarah, over at Perry's, says he has an hinstitooton for the hinsane. I think if he'd a took Mr. Cowell there some time ago, Mrs. Cowell would a been all right. Of all the haggravatin' beins, he is the haggravatinest."

To which they all agreed. A ring at the bell, and another from Mrs. Cowell's room, sent Jane and Saunders to their duties.

Dr. Martin, as sent for and prepared by Sir John, came to take charge of Mr. Cowell. Saunders took him upstairs. He recognized the condition of his patient, and succeeded in communicating with him by requesting him to open or close his eyes in reply. This was all he could do. Saunders was warned that his master could both hear and see, but that there was

nothing that could be done unless there was some change.

"Lor! will he starve to death?" asked the man, unguardedly.

Dr. Martin gave him a warning look. "I hope he will soon be able both to swallow and to speak," he replied. At this the eyes closed.

When Miss Jones woke, Nettie was apparently asleep. Jane was placed beside her, while the good housekeeper went for some refreshment. Several heavy cares pressed upon her. Removing Mrs. Cowell was a great responsibility, supporting her for an indefinite time was another. The salary would not last very long. If Mr. Cowell lived, what would become of them? If he died, to whom would he leave his property? Amid these revolving thoughts a memory came of the kind advice given her by Mrs. Stepney before she died: "Live one day at a time, my dear," she had said; "We only have sunlight for one day. We do not work by the light of the moon. Do each day's duties as best you can." Miss Jones determined to try and act on this rule. She knew her present duties; they were very clearly defined. The first was to see Mr. Cowell. She was really shocked by his condition, and his actual danger of starving. His eyes opened pleadingly; she at once told him of Mrs. Cowell's illness, and that it was brain fever; he seemed to hear. She then asked for the usual allowance of money for weekly expenses, telling him to close his eyes if he wished her to take it from his money-drawer. He signified his assent. She counted out twice the usual sum, showed it to him, telling him that she needed it for the extra expenses of illness. He made no sign, and then she left him to Saunders' care. Sir John soon came to see his patient, who was unconscious but quiet. He gave orders and

prepared remedies, saying, "I am treating her in preparation for her removal; when she is safely away from here, we must pursue a different plan. Meanwhile we must see Mr. Selwyn, and explain all fully to him, if you are sure he is safe."

"I am perfectly sure of him——"

Nettie murmured, "Henry!"

"Who?" asked Sir John.

"She was engaged to marry him, but poverty obliged her to accept Mr. Cowell," whispered the housekeeper, who knew the whole story from Mrs. Stepney.

The kind heart of Sir John needed nothing additional to add to his interest and care, but it seemed as if his tone was more pitying than ever, as he turned toward the flushed face, and felt the pulse that beat so irregularly and heavily.

The lawyer was sent for. It took him some time to grasp the changes wrought in twenty-four hours, but he had no difficulty in believing anything bad of Mr. Cowell, and professed his deep interest in his wife, of whose removal, under Sir John's care, he entirely approved. He proposed, as an additional safeguard, that Mrs. Cowell should be known as Mrs. Gregory, taking her husband's second name, which was not generally known—certainly not by Matson. That Miss Jones should remain, he considered imperative, and she reluctantly consented to do so. From all the symptoms it seemed probable she would not long be detained. After he had gone, there was nothing to do but to watch the patients, until the letter came from Mrs. Woener. For certain reasons, known only to herself and Sir John, Miss Jones was suffering from a sort of remorse. She was not wholly guiltless as a cause of Mrs. Cowell's illness, although she had not intended to do her a wrong, but every expression of suffering had

its sting for the housekeeper. Her care was unremitting, but one cannot always atone for a wrong, and Miss Jones knew that she had not atoned.

Saturday and Sunday passed; Monday brought Mrs. Woener's letter; she was very glad to do anything for any friend of Miss Stainer's—for by this name she knew Mr. Cowell's housekeeper; her rooms would be ready on the Tuesday.

"We must remove her on Monday night," said Sir John; "my nurse will be at the station. Have the house quiet as early as possible; the fewer who can trace us the better. Can Mr. Cowell's door be closed?"

"He cannot prevent it now," was the reply.

No food or water could be swallowed by Mr. Cowell; he still could only open and close his eyes. It was a terrible situation, and one that might continue for some time. He evidently retained his always acute hearing, and no one could help feeling sorrow for his fearful condition. He could give no sign.

Monday night came; Nettie seemed to understand, and weakly tried to help the preparations. She called Sir John "Papa," he always replying, "Yes, my daughter."

Mr. Cowell's door was closed; the faithful Saunders slept in an arm-chair beside his master. The servants were sent to bed. The express which passed the station at one o'clock had been ordered to stop. The new nurse had taken a whole compartment, and was ready to receive her patient. Nettie gave no trouble; she looked dazed, but an unmistakable wave of relief passed over her face as she was put in the carriage with Sir John.

"We will go to mamma," she said.

"Yes, my daughter," said the loving and soothing voice.

She bore the change and the journey very well, accepting the new attendant without question ; in fact she seemed to have no power of recognition, excepting for Sir John. He watched her carefully, knowing that she had a long and weary illness before her, he having simply kept her in a condition to bear the journey. The illness was deferred.

Mrs. Woener's cottage proved to be all that was necessary. Nettie was soon comfortably placed in bed ; every preparation made for the illness that had only been held in abeyance. Those who know of Sir John Conolly, and of his fully-occupied life, will understand that he could not remain with his patient—imperative duties called him to Hanwell. He placed the case in the care of the Ambleside physician, promised to return each week, and requested all letters to be sent to his care. The reason of the precautions was to defeat Matson, if he should in any way trace her. There was not much danger, for the nefarious business in which he was engaged was not one that sought out cases in open daylight, and sufficient warning was given to Mrs. Woener, to the nurse and the physician. Besides this, Sir John having introduced Nettie as Mrs. Gregory, and Miss Jones being only known to them as Miss Stainer, there seemed little danger. If anything or any change made his presence necessary, he promised to be with them as soon as possible. After this, he was obliged to return home, where his own houseful of patients always needed him. Can there be a truer philanthropy than such as was his care of the insane ? They were not only in comfort and luxury with him, but were treated according to their positions in life, their mental aberrations respected and guarded, and their tastes consulted. At one time Mr. Edwin Forrest, who was studying the character of Hamlet, consulted Sir John in re-

gard to it. After some conversation, Sir John invited him to dine, only remarking, as if casually, "I must ask you to allow me to lead the conversation; some of the guests whom I will invite to meet you have peculiar political views."

The dinner passed off delightfully, the guests were all from the higher ranks of life, intellectual people, and some highly gifted. After dinner, when showing the grounds to his guest, Mr. Forrest said to him, "I have discovered your secret."

"How?" asked Sir John.

"I found it impossible to catch the eye of any one of your friends. Although there was not a word that the most perfectly sane might not utter, not an eye was ever fixed on one."

Miss Jones was once for a few months a housekeeper at this establishment, and in this way knew how thoroughly she could trust Nettie to the care of Sir John, if she could interest him in her case. What he did for her, proved how wisely the judgment was formed.

To return to Cowell House. The morning after Nettie was safely removed, Jane came rushing in her most excited way to tell Miss Jones that Mrs. Cowell was not in her room, "nor nowheres."

"She went away last night, to stay with a friend. I had her removed when all was quiet, to prevent her being excited by seeing people, and also because you know the light distressed her so much. She is quite safe, Jane, and much better away now, for Mr. Cowell cannot live, and we may have some confusion here soon."

Jane was quite pacified, but when the hour for gossip came in the kitchen, she said, "I hope Miss Jones hasn't been a puttin' her in no asylum; she isn't one bit crazy—just out of her head like."

"Lor'," said the cook, "them men that was here to dinner never took her, do you think?"

Jane did not intend to deceive, but the temptation to know a great deal more than the others was upon her, so she shook her head wisely, replying, "Miss Jones knows. I suppose she means well, but my opinion is she'd a been safer in her own house." Whereupon the servants decided that Mrs. Cowell was in some insane asylum. An interview that Mr. Adam, whom Sir John knew as Matson, had that day with Miss Jones and Mr. Selwyn, strengthened them in this idea. If they had seen the half-concealed rage of Mr. Adam when he left the house and entered a carriage in which were two assistants, they might have been convinced that he was not in charge of their mistress.

Saunders reported Mr. Cowell as "that fidgety, that he seemed like a lion in a cage." There was no difficulty in knowing why, by the two who knew the guilt of the old man; perhaps he heard the movements in the night; perhaps he heard Matson's voice in the morning. Certainly there was a questioning look in his wide-open eyes that touched the hearts of both Miss Jones and the lawyer as they went together to his bedside.

"Mrs. Cowell is more comfortable to-day," said Miss Jones, cheerfully. "I spent a part of the money in adding to her wardrobe, and in other things for her."

Such a puzzled look came into the eyes that Miss Jones, who could not be sorry for him very long, could scarcely keep from laughing. Then there was, indeed, the caged-lion look, and she added, "I wish we knew how to relieve you. If you could only tell us! Would you like to be rubbed? Close your eyes if you mean yes."

The eyes remained open.

"Would you like to see Mr. Selwyn alone?"

The eyes closed. Miss Jones and Saunders left the room. The lawyer told him to try to keep composed; that his affairs were all perfectly understood. If he recovered, he would find that every care had been taken of them; if he died, the directions in his will would be carefully complied with. Still the eyes were open. There was something else. "Mrs. Cowell is very ill with brain fever; she has every possible care, and you need have no anxiety in regard to her. Some person—a Mr. Adam—called to inquire for her to-day, but did not see her, and he returned home." Then the eyes closed, and the lawyer knew that the sin was at least regretted, for Mr. Cowell was comparatively at rest.

"Oh!" said Miss Jones, "do you think he had suffered enough? I wanted him to have one anxious day."

"Yes, he has suffered enough," said the lawyer, gravely; "he ought to know the truth. Remember, he will starve to death. Do not add one more pang."

A month passed. Mr. Cowell died, as he had lived for several weeks, unable to speak, to move, or to swallow. Nothing was left undone that was possible. He was kept informed of his wife's condition, and supposed she was in her room. Her illness was very severe; but before he died she began to recover. This he was told. One morning when Saunders woke, his master was dead. There was no grief. There were no relatives to mourn him; the funeral was private, and he was buried according to directions held by Mr. Selwyn. The servants were dismissed, some one put in charge of the house, and Miss Jones, who had been faithful to the end, accompanied by Mr. Selwyn, went first to London, thence to Hanwell to consult with Sir John, and then to Mrs. Woener's.

When she reached London she left off her green shade, ceased to speak in a squeaking voice, and amazed Mr. Selwyn by losing about twenty years in age, and coming out a handsome young woman. This transformation she explained to him. Mr. Cowell had advertised for a middle-aged housekeeper; the salary and situation were good, so she adopted this mode of disguising her good looks, and had successfully posed for a weak-eyed woman of fifty, calling herself Jones, during all her residence at the Cowell house. More than this she told him. She was a daughter of Mrs. Stepney's sister, and had come from India expecting to live with her aunt. Failing to find her, she was cast upon her own resources, and had varying experiences as nursemaid, and as housekeeper for Sir John, who at one time needed a temporary supply, and then for Mr. Cowell. Then, to her utter amazement, she found that the bride for whom he told her to prepare was her own cousin, and that Mrs. Stepney was the aunt for whom she had vainly sought. She dared not disclose this for fear of being dismissed, so she carefully watched first over her aunt, to whom she confided her secret, and then devoted herself to endeavoring to make her cousin's position more endurable. Fortunately, by never opposing Mr. Cowell, she had gained his confidence, and was able to do much for his wife.

"Somehow," she said, "I never gained the affections of my cousin. She tried so hard to be loyal to her exasperating husband that she resented all of my little deceptions by which I could have helped her. I loved her for it, but it vexed me, too. Then I could talk just as my aunt did, and I imitated her voice till I frightened the poor child so that I shall have no peace till she recovers."

The lawyer shook his head in dismay. He could not see why all this deception was necessary.

He *would not*, Miss Jones thought ; but she was under the impression that she had acted for the best ; so she cast off her cares with her confession, came out as Miss Stainer, and asked no forgiveness. For Nettie she reserved what little penitence she felt. She was not a perfect character, but had one admirable quality highly developed : it was self-sacrifice, and her work was not yet done.

Nettie had sufficiently recovered to be informed of her relationship to the housekeeper, for whose coming she anxiously waited. She was not well enough to be moved ; therefore Mr. Selwyn was to go to her with her husband's will, which was only to be opened in her presence.

After two days at Hanwell, which is near London, Miss Stainer and Mr. Selwyn bade farewell to their kind friend and adviser, and went together to the lake district, where the carriage that waited for them at the station soon took them to Mrs. Woener's cottage.

CHAPTER XIII.

A COTTAGE covered with vines and roses, the bloom pierced here and there by windows. A porch half-hidden under ivy vines and bright flowers. Under the shade and shelter, in a comfortable easy chair, with Mrs. Woener standing beside her, was Nettie, very pale but very lovely, with an expression of peace and rest that gave an added beauty to her girlish face. A closely-fitting cap made her look even younger, though she would gladly have had her beautiful hair restored, that had been sacrificed during her illness. She was still weak, unable to bear any excitement, but unmistakably recovering. A week before this day, Sir John himself broke to her the varied and startling news of her husband's death, omitting its fearful character, and of the *ci-devant* housekeeper's relationship to herself. He also explained her simulation of her mother's voice, and her ghostly endeavor to get possession of Henry's letter. "She is an odd person," he added, smiling; "certainly meaning to do right, but rather regardless of how it is accomplished. You will find her ready to devote her life to you, for she is filled with remorse at having frightened you."

"She certainly did frighten me dreadfully, and I somehow never felt at ease with her; then I never wanted to deceive Mr. Cowell, and she constantly did this. In some way I failed with Mr. Cowell; I meant to do my duty, but when he held my hand my strength all seemed to leave me, and a strange desire to escape

from him was irresistible. I wish I could have done more for him."

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with, my child; he was an exasperating tyrant. Forget him; let him pass from your life. Now, let me ask one question: Do you wish any effort made to find the 'Henry' of whom you used to talk in your illness?"

Nettie's face flushed the deepest crimson.

"No, dear friend, not yet—perhaps never. In a year or two he may find me, if he wishes to do so. He can have no difficulty in this. It is not for me to look for him, and certainly I have no right to think of him now. Please forget that I spoke his name."

So Sir John left her in her peaceful home, and at last the day came when she was watching for her cousin and Mr. Selwyn.

"They are coming!" she exclaimed, as a carriage drove rapidly to the gate.

"You darling, you precious creature," were the words that amazed Nettie, for they came from a beautiful young girl, who was laughing and crying over her. "I thought I should never get here. How lovely you do look! Oh—can it be possible you don't know me? I am Alice—I am Miss Jones, the wretched deception with the green shade."

Nettie could hardly be made to believe in the transformation, and as she held Mr. Selwyn's hand, said, "Is this really Alice? Am I to believe her?"

"You may," replied the lawyer, laughing; "she changed more gradually to me, and on the whole I prefer her in her present guise, though what form she will take on the morrow I cannot tell."

"You are a traitor," replied Alice; "you know I have repented of all my sins, and my life is to be devoted to this dear old lady, who looks about twelve

years in that funny baby-cap. Look at me, Nettie ; am I not real and true ?"

"'Real,' I must believe, 'true,' time will show. I have much to thank you for, dear Alice, and something to forgive."

"If you don't forgive me, out and out, you are too ungrateful to live. We are going to have nothing but joy and gladness from morning to night," and Alice pirouetted and kissed Nettie, and showered loving words upon her until she brought color and laughter back to the pale face.

Alice was in radiant spirits ; she saw no trouble for the future ; Mr. Selwyn had been unable to resist some revelation of the contents of Mr. Cowell's will ; and Nettie's future looked so bright to Miss Stainer that her spirits were on the rebound after her long anxiety. Nettie was hardly strong enough to bear the excitement, but although feeling dizzy, she tried to appreciate her cousin's joyousness, and looked happy enough until Alice unfortunately exclaimed :

"Bless my heart, you ought to have a widow's cap ; you shan't wear black, though!"

Poor Nettie had by no means reached a point where jesting was agreeable to her, and she was at least grave in the memory that her husband had been dead so short a time. She made no pretence of sorrow, still she did not intend that he or his peculiarities should be ridiculed, nor that there should be any failing in outward respect. A black gown she certainly intended to wear as soon as she could go out, although all the painful particulars of cap and crape had not yet been much thought of. She made no reply to this thoughtless exclamation, but with one reproachful look at Alice, frightened them both by suddenly fainting.

Mrs. Woener and the nurse rushed to the rescue.

"She's too weak to see folks; her nerves is that uncertain she goes off in a minit," said the nurse, as the two women carried their charge to the safe shelter and repose of her room. Alice was in dismay, and turned to the lawyer for sympathy. "I'd like to know whether I ever will reach a place or a condition where I can be myself! Here I am, once more Alice Stainer, the squeaky voice, the green shade, the hateful Miss Jones all swept away; I cannot possibly regret that dreadful man; if he had wanted to be mourned, he ought, like Herod, to have ordered a lot of people killed when he died. What did the child faint for? What did I say?" and she walked up and down the little path to the gate to the immense amusement of Mr. Selwyn, who greatly enjoyed his association with this new variety of woman.

"I do not wonder that you are happy in your release," he replied, "for there is hardly a more weary burden than an assumed character. You do well to rejoice, but—have you ever been ill?"

"Never," she answered with a sort of snap, as if that was an impossible weakness.

"Then you have something to learn. I was once ill, and I shall never forget the unutterable exhaustion I experienced when particularly well and happy people came to see me, and put on their jolliest moods to raise my spirits. I felt as if I wanted to close my eyes and stop my ears. You have something yet to learn."

Alice sighed. "I doubt if my education will ever be completed. There is one comfort in store for me: from Will's last letter I know that he and I are destined to enjoy the good things of life, and to have many a frolic. He must be a big boy now; fourteen is a delightful age—but really I will try to cultivate repose," and as Nettie did not return to them that evening, she and Mr. Selwyn had an opportunity of discussing how

she could best adjust herself to this new phase of life. Alice was most unselfish, and yet it was pleasant to be an object of interest, even to the grave lawyer who, on his side, found the radiant young girl a very delightful companion, and felt no disposition to have her spirits repressed. They passed the twilight hours in a row upon the lake, and found the evening too short for all that they had to talk of.

The next morning Nettie was able to listen to the reading of the will, the lawyer, Miss Stainer, and herself only being present. A more simple document could not very well have been drawn. There were small bequests to the servants. A gift to Miss Jones of fifty pounds, the same to Mr. Selwyn, and then every sort of property that he owned was left to his "beloved wife, Nettie," with the one condition that she should take the name of Gregory, that having been his mother's name, and the property which she left to him being burdened with the condition that either his child or his widow should bear this name, "Mrs. Gregory!"

"It is fortunate you began with it," exclaimed Alice, "but of all horrid names! Will we ever be able to know each other? Such a changing I never heard of. Then, of course, Mrs. Gregory cannot properly wear weeds for Mr. Cowell. She may come out in flowers again."

"Alice!" exclaimed Nettie.

Alice shrugged her shoulders penitently, and offered her services to order crape an inch thick to commemorate the life and death of the master of Cowell House. Nettie looked distressed, and turning to Mr. Selwyn said, "I am much surprised at Mr. Cowell's will, and very grateful to him; am I at liberty to live as, and where, I please?"

"You are entirely your own mistress, madam. If you

do me the honor to consult me I can only give advice, for that, with anything I can do, you have only to ask."

"Thank you, my kind friend. I am hardly strong enough to make any plans at present, but would like the children to come as soon as possible. We can remain here until Miss Stainer and I can decide on our future. Cowell House can remain in charge of the person you have placed there. Now will you kindly order a carriage that I may try if I am strong enough for exercise this afternoon."

Mr. Selwyn, who had always felt a deep interest in the much tried wife of his client, was pleased with her calm mode of accepting her fortune and her liberty, mentally vowed himself her devoted servant, and determined to remain as long as he could be spared from his other duties—at least until she was able to make some decision as to her future home. Nettie went to her room; "Thank you, my kind nurse," she said to the woman who watched her every movement, and who waited for her, "I intend to be strong and well now, but I have a great deal to think of; please keep every one from me; bring up my dinner, so that I can be alone until we drive."

Alone! Was it wrong that a thought of Henry came to her from whom she had heard nothing for so many years? So long she had repressed, in fact had conquered his image, that now that she was free she hardly dared to look at what so recently had been a sin. So many thoughts surged through her brain, hardly yet strong enough to bear any pressure, that the need of help reminded her of Him who gave the promise to guide, to counsel, and to give strength for every need. Prayer soon quieted and restored her; like a little child she put her cares aside, trusting them to the Father, and lying peacefully upon her lounge, she was able to sleep until Mrs. Walters, the nurse, brought up her tray with dinner.

CHAPTER XIV.

MEANWHILE Miss Stainer was not idle. She investigated the size and condition of the cottage, found it large enough to accommodate them all, and that Mrs. Woener would gladly rent it and remain as cook if they wished, so that if Nettie liked the idea of making it a temporary residence, it could be furnished and made very comfortable until she was strong and well again. Cowell House was a horror to them both.

"My goodness!" she exclaimed, to Mr. Selwyn, "did you say that Mrs.—Gregory—is going to drive? Then, of course, she will be an edifying monument of crape. I suppose by this time she has opened the boxes; equally, of course, I must do a little affliction. The country-people, probably, know that her husband is dead, and there is no need to publish that no one is sorry, so I will go to Ambleside and see if I can find a few yards of grief. I forgot all about my near relationship, when I was running up that bill for Nettie, at Swan & Edgar's. Come with me, Mr. Selwyn. I can walk faster when I talk."

"And talk faster when you walk?" he asked, laughingly.

"Certainly; if you are not satisfied with my present abilities, I will talk at double quick." But Mr. Selwyn was entirely satisfied, and had began to think the ex-housekeeper was, for brightness, cheerfulness, endurance and executive ability, about the one woman of whose existence he had never heard before. The ex-

periences of lawyers with women, are not always such as to raise the genus in their estimation. These inconsequent beings have an exasperating way of signing their names to papers which they do not take the trouble to read, or certainly not to comprehend. They are puzzled between debit and credit, they cannot calculate interest, they think of stocks as old Weller did: "things in the city that go up and down." And—but perhaps this is a slander—they are said to have destroyed receipts, to prevent their being sent in again! Here was a woman who had all her wits in their proper pigeon-holes, who understood legal terms, who kept her accounts rigidly, and who was undismayed by any weight of care, bearing such burdens easily as came to her, and seeming to rejoice in those that she could bear for others. As Carlyle said of some one, "of a clear, smiling nature." The lawyer's dull life was brightened by her flow of spirits, and he was even leniently disposed toward a certain picturesqueness, or, more clearly, *inaccuracy* of statements, which was strangely at variance with her exactness in all money affairs, and in whatever was entrusted to her care. "They are all contradictory," he said to himself, as he prepared to follow Miss Stainer, who was holding the gate open for him, before he found his hat.

"What are you thinking of?" asked the lady, as he joined her. "Do you know you had your hat in your hand all the time?"

"No! had I really? Then I must confess I paused a moment to consider the contradictory traits in some women I have known."

"How absurd! We might as well be men, with well-defined professions, if we cannot have the privilege of being a dozen things at once. Fancy all that a woman must be to fill her position in life. Think of the daily

life of a wife and mother. She is housekeeper and bookkeeper, often teacher, and always general sympathiser. Her husband thinks her stupid, if she cannot talk with him intelligently of the news of the day. If she makes a blunder in politics, or even in history or geography, he heaves a sigh from his boots. No familiarity with whooping-cough or measles excuses 'culpable ignorance on such every-day matters.' It is a serious truth that

> 'Man's work is from sun to sun,
> Woman's work is never done.'

"Of course we seem contradictory, but we are not; we are true as the needle to the pole, but like this same old compass, indulge in variations occasionally."

"Yes—my—dear—and in deviations as well," said the lawyer, who was fairly out of breath, both mentally and physically, in his efforts, to follow his leader. "Now walk a little slower, and let me tell you that I think Mrs. Gregory ought to engage a carriage for daily exercise, so that she can have one properly appointed. Very creditable ones can be hired, and until she decides on how and where to live, this plan will be best."

"All this impresses me immensely with the value of money," she said, laughing. "Did you ever see the old hearse that Mr. Cowell called 'the carriage'?"

"Yes, indeed, and many a time I have remonstrated with him about it. He was a miser by nature, and I doubt if he would have left his money to his wife if he had known what else to do with it. I hope she will be able to hear more details to-morrow, for I cannot stay much longer. The children will be here soon."

"It used to make my heart ache to see how Nettie longed to see them. Mr. Cowell seldom showed her even

her own letters from them; now and then I managed to smuggle one to her, but she usually cried for days afterwards, poor child."

"I don't wonder she had brain fever."

"If you had known half she endured, you would not have wondered if she had lost her reason altogether. I really thought that revelations from her mother would comfort her, but somehow she did not take kindly to them."

"It was too ghostly a subject to jest about," replied the lawyer, gravely.

"Yes, but you do not understand my difficulties. She began by trying to be a loyal wife, and resented my efforts to give her little comforts in a secret way; besides that, she was a little jealous of my influence with her mother, whom you know I discovered to be the dear aunt for whom I had been looking, so that I hardly knew how to fulfil my promises, Nettie was so dreadfully high-minded."

"Hardly a fault," said the lawyer.

"That depends upon whom it hits," retorted Miss Stainer; "in this case it hit me, and prevented my honest efforts to do her a kindness. So I bethought me of her mother's promise to watch over her, and I treated her to sundry bits of counsel and wisdom which she would not have noticed if she had known they originated under my green shade. She nearly caught me one night; I was trying to find a letter that I knew had come from Henry Mason to Mrs. Stepney. I thought she ought to have it, so I crept in when I thought they were both asleep—you know how the room was planned. Mr. Cowell's bed in a draught of air at one end, Nettie's behind that Japanese curtain at the other extreme end of the room, the secretary against the centre of the wall, opposite the door. I look like my

aunt, and Nettie seeing me through the curtain, thought I was her ghost. She moved a little, and I had to glide off. Ghosts don't run, you know, and I was mortally afraid of being caught. I made for a broom-closet that opens into my room, and had hardly reached it before she was after me. I put my hand over my eyes and appeared at my door just as Nettie had reached the closet in which the ghost disappeared. Now don't you see that I could not explain to her why I was looking into her husband's secretary, because I did not want her to know of the letter unless I could find it for her?"

Even the legal mind of Mr. Selwyn could not decide on a proper reproof, so he only asked if she found the letter.

"No; I think Mr. Cowell destroyed all that came. I wrote once to Mr. Mason and told him of Mrs. Stepney's death. Nettie never mentioned him in any way. I think she would have thought it a mortal sin to have spoken his name."

"She is a remarkable woman," said Mr. Selwyn, "but I regret to see her look so pale and weary. When she is better I would advise the Continent for awhile. Will she keep the children with her?"

"I know nothing of her plans; she has been unable to write, and we have had no conversation. Her heart now is full of the children. I wonder if they will be grown out of recognition."

"Possibly, but, by the way, did we not come for something? It is time for our early dinner."

"We came for a veil for me, and while you were gazing in the shop window I purchased it, and now we are going home. You are a very contradictory person, my good friend," replied his companion, with a merry laugh, "full of variations and deviations, I regret to discover."

"Yes, subject to all weaknesses. It is by knowing my own sins that I recognize those of others. Not apropos of sins, but of sinners, did you bring the contents of the secretary for Mrs. Cowell?"

"Please do me justice; I had no reason to penetrate into that sanctum which contained private papers, medicine-chests, money, and, for aught I know, family secrets, so I ordered the whole affair boxed up and sent to Nettie. It will be in a nice mess if there is an inkstand in it!" They both laughed over this very probable catastrophe, which it was too late to prevent, and having reached the gate, hastened in to dinner, a meal they were obliged to enjoy without Nettie.

She became more composed, and after an hour's rest looked with some interest on the two unopened boxes that had been brought to her room during the morning. The keys were beside them, so that she had no trouble in discovering that her odd cousin, who would have persuaded her to make no outward sign of woe, had provided her with an entire wardrobe of everything proper for the most deeply-afflicted widow. "What an extraordinary girl Alice is," thought Nettie, as she selected the softest and least objectionable of the black gowns, and tried the traditional widow's cap in place of the inartistic one invented in Ambleside. The vision of the sweet, girlish face, although colorless and thinner than it once was, was too lovely to be disfigured by its framing, and Nettie was by no means displeased with the effect. There were no swollen eyes, or traces of sadness, though there was a reverent stillness at the thought of the death of her husband, and a sincere grief that his death was one of suffering, how great she did not know. She encouraged no memory of what she had borne from the heartless old man, but fixed her mind resolutely on his kindness in making her

quite independent, and was already planning the happiness she could give to those she loved, and to the needy. Several times her hands touched her locket, but conscience whispered to her, "Not yet, not yet."

When the carriage was announced, and Nettie went down-stairs, she fairly startled her friends. "Bless my heart!" exclaimed Alice, and "Oh — er — my dear madam, is that you?" faltered the lawyer.

"Certainly," replied Nettie, gravely. "I thank you very much, Alice, for your thoughtfulness; everything is just what I wanted. Now let us go, and don't think any more about me."

The drive was only half around the lake, but every mile and every moment was thoroughly enjoyed. Many plans were made by Alice for excursions and explorations, to which Nettie assented quietly, but with a sort of stillness that alarmed her cousin. It was one experience to look on at what Nettie had passed through in the last few years, and quite another one to have endured it. Shattered hopes, a crushed love, separation from all that were dear, the constant companionship of a tyrannical old master, the deprivation of all occupation and recreations, had almost palsied the young heart as well as shattered the brain. Nettie could not explain her strange feelings; she only knew that she wanted to be at rest for a while, till the roaring and ringing in her head should cease, and life be plain and easy to her once more. She had not been told of the living tomb from which she really was rescued, but only knew that she had been brought to the cottage for quiet, while Mr. Cowell was ill, and that he did not know where she was. When reason came back more clearly, she asked Sir John, "What will he do to me when I go back?" Mr. Cowell was then past recovery, and her good friend replied, "My dear child, you shall

never go back, trust to me." After that the advance toward health was rapid. Mr. Cowell's death soon followed; her release was explained to her, and, as before told, so were also the oddities and yet the loving care of the housekeeper. It was a great deal for Nettie to bear, but to the bewildered brain there is no greater help than the removal of fear and the solution of mysteries. It seemed as if a great weight were lifted, though she hardly dared to try her wings, feeling as a bird released from a cage, unable to appreciate her freedom.

"You may safely trust your cousin now," Sir John told her, "though you may need to balance her love of fun a little by your own good judgment. You had better travel; go to Rome for the winter."

"Oh, no, no!" said Nettie. "I want to be quiet. I have wasted so much time, perhaps I can do some good now."

The kind physician smiled, without saying that he fancied a child could do as much, but answered, "You are to have your own way exactly, and to be utterly spoiled by indulgence." At this Nettie treated him to a shower of tears, and called him "dear papa."

Then Alice and Mr. Selwyn came, as has been told. The cottage was hired and made comfortable. The children came and filled house and hearts with joy and gladness, though it took some days for them to understand the changes in both circumstances and appearances. At first Nettie in her black gown and sombre cap filled them with awe, while she was amazed at the tall boy and the transformation of the baby Kate. Alice, too, had to find her place in their hearts. Before long all went smoothly. Happiness is an unfailing lubricator. One of their greatest pleasures was a visit now and then from Sir John, who called their little home "the happy valley."

"How about Rome?" he asked one day.

"Now, dear papa," said Nettie, "what more can you ask? The children are doing admirably at school, Alice and I are reading all sorts of learned books and studying German. Six poor families live in the light of our countenances and on the remnants from our kitchen. I have a class in Sunday-school; we take a whole day each week for an excursion. Why should we go?"

He tapped the cheek to which color had returned, but did not ask, "Why, then, the wistful look in those bright eyes?"

CHAPTER XV.

It was some time after Nettie's release before her sensitive conscience would allow her to open the little locket in which Henry's precious letters were enclosed. In the meanwhile she examined Mr. Cowell's secretary, which reached the cottage in safety, being only partly damaged by the overturn of a very little ink. The medicine-chest was in perfect order. All sorts of remedies for all sorts of diseases, carefully prepared and labelled. Orders for flowers in the proper pigeon-hole. Bills and receipts. Letters of one year's dates. Ready money in a large sum. Then—about a dozen envelopes in Henry's writing, not one of them containing its letter. The dates on the envelopes were from the time of Mrs. Stepney's death, and bore post-marks of many towns quite unknown to Nettie—Duluth, St. Paul, and so on, the latest being San Francisco. Not one word by which she could learn anything of him. Not a clue of where to write, if, indeed, writing had been the proper thing to do. It was after this disappointment that one night when all eyes were closed in sleep, Nettie opened her locket, and smoothed the folds of the two letters. It seemed to her that they were illumined like the page in St. Francesca's missal. Like the saint of old, she had performed every duty as far as she knew it; she could not utterly efface her lover's image, but she had never indulged herself in recalling it, and now there need be no morbid self-reproaches; if Henry were still free, she was free to

love him. Is it wonder that his words seemed golden legends to her gaze? She read, and read and read again the loving words, and brighter and brighter grew the pages. Yes, she would trust him to find her. Somehow he would know that she was free again, and "I am so glad my name is not Cowell," she exclaimed. "Anything is better than that." Nettie knew but little of the world, or of cares outside of her own, and the thought never came to her that Henry might find her more easily by a name that he knew. Troubles in this life are like great rivers, formed by many little streams. They do not always begin a mile wide, nor run at first as a resistless torrent. So Nettie was very bright and hopeful for many weeks after this, and then by degrees she began to wonder if Henry had heard, then whether he would ever hear, and then her sweet eyes took that wistful look that Sir John noticed and grieved over.

One day a few little brown curls began to appear below the cap, and Nettie looked lovelier than ever. "But, my dear," exclaimed Alice, "what do they mean by being brown? I always thought your blonde hair and dark eyebrows and lashes were such a fascinating incongruity, such a delightful inconsistency. Now if you are going to be gotten up all to match, you won't be half so interesting."

"I'm sorry," laughed Nettie, "for I fear I can no longer pass as a 'fascinating incongruity;' my hair is growing a decided brown, and matching my eyebrows perfectly. Try and endure it, for I don't know how I can help it."

Alice sighed, and said "I will write a poem on the lost tresses." At this, the children who adored their sister and feared her feelings might be wounded, insisted that she was more beautiful than ever; that brown hair was lovely, and that nothing could improve her, "un-

less," added Kate, "she would wear a pink silk, or a pink rose in her bonnet."

"Or," said Alice, "pin up her crape veil with a wreath of scarlet fuchsias."

"Now you are making fun again, Alice. Don't you really think Nettie is beautiful?" insisted Will.

"I really do; are you satisfied?" said Alice.

"Don't be ridiculous, children," said Nettie. "Come with me, there is a huge basket to be carried to widow Green's, and I am going to read to her, and if Alice wants my 'lost tresses' she can find them in a box in my wardrobe carefully preserved by the nurse."

"You absurd child," returned Alice, "shall I send them over the sea?"

To this shot Nettie made no answer, but taking her hymn-book for the comfort of the widow Green, she and the children went off on their errand of mercy. It so happened that a young curate, who was working hard among the poor, was ministering to the wants of the widow when Mrs. Gregory entered; she left the children outside, and tried to carry her basket herself; of course Mr. Mills was ready with help, and greatly pleased with the opportunity of speaking to the beautiful widow, whose fortunes and misfortunes had not passed quite as unnoticed in the neighborhood as she hoped. She and Alice and the children went regularly to church, and she had a class in the school; the resident clergyman called at stated times, but Mrs. Gregory being in deep mourning, the visit of his wife had not been returned, and it so happened the curate had never been presented. This basket which he considered an especial blessing to himself, was fairly seized upon. Nettie looked up with her grave smile, but was not as ready as the young man to improve the new acquaintance. She made her ministrations short that day, and Mr. Mills

was obliged to remain some time after she left, but as the widow Green supplemented the recital of her own woes with the story of the kindness of Mrs. Gregory, the hour was unusually endurable. Mr. Mills was a curate *made*, not born ; his profession was a trial to him. He had neither convictions nor experiences. Sorrow and suffering frightened him ; not knowing its needs, he had never found its remedy. He thought himself a remarkably good and self-sacrificing fellow ; compared his dreary life with that of his popular brother, who had money enough and to spare, and fully expected an especially well-appointed mansion in the golden city. Sermon-writing was utterly beyond his powers ; he watched the advertisements of "Sermons for sale," and treated his hearers to such varieties of style and doctrine that those who listened were filled with wonder and despair. Fortunately very few listened. Nettie made several conscientious efforts to do so, but finally gave it up. She was able to read the character and to fathom its resources, therefore there was no interest to her in the persistent visits that followed what Alice called the "basket act."

"Alice, do go down and see that tiresome man ; he has been here three times this week," exclaimed Nettie one day. Alice did as she wished, and his visit was short. When she returned she was unusually grave ; Nettie looked up from her book, inquiringly.

"What did he want ?"

"I fancy I know better than he does," she replied. "I'm sorry for that poor boy. He has some faint idea that there are certain duties required of him, and he knows no more how to fulfil them than a child. He is not even religious, and knows nothing of piety——"

"What do you mean ? What difference is there between religion and piety ?"

"Perhaps there is no difference, but I think many persons have a sort of code of religious morality founded on principles of right, and call it religion, but it comes from outside, and in fact never penetrates the heart, while piety is an inner life and a growth; this poor boy has neither. He was obliged to be a curate for his support."

"Yes, I knew that, and soon discovered that he had no convictions. He wearies me inexpressibly."

"But," continued Alice, "I am sorry for him. I wish I knew how to help him. Your mother would know just what to say, and she would think that it was her duty to show him the truth. She told me once never to neglect opportunities of usefulness; that opportunities were responsibilities, particularly if they were not of my own seeking. That a higher power controlled what we termed accidents and circumstances, and it was for us to improve them."

"Dear mother! What a comfort she would have been now. I am sure I don't know how to talk about such things, but when I see him again I will do the best I can. He follows me so that I don't dare to go to the Green's."

It was not many days before the curate appeared again at the cottage. A severe storm kept Nettie indoors, and Mr. Mills was announced while she was reading in the parlor. "This is one of the circumstances," she thought, as she received her visitor. He plunged so suddenly into the subject of his thoughts that she was quite startled.

"Mrs. Gregory, how do you know what to say to those tiresome old women? How can you be so cheerful when you are talking to them?"

"I am cheerful because I am happy, and cheerful with them because they need brightness. I do not

know much, but I read that one of the fruits of the Spirit's power is joy, and that the Saviour told His disciples they must glorify God by showing these fruits."

"That's a real sermon; where did you find it all?"

"Why—in the Bible of course. I find something every day to think of and to help me."

"Do you tell the women such things?"

"Not that exactly, but there is always something that I have been reading which seems to be what they want."

Mr. Mills sighed; Nettie was not much of a teacher, but she tried again.

"I try to think what I would want if I were ill and helpless; then, of course, I supply their actual needs, because it is useless to talk if—for instance—they are hungry. After that I try to give them some pleasant thoughts."

"It seems as if I had read something like that in the 'lessons,' about not saying 'Be ye warmed and fed,' unless you help them."

"You most certainly have, if you have read the Gospels. Mr. Mills," she added thoughtfully, for he seemed so ignorant she hardly knew what to say, "take a few verses each day, and kneel down and ask the Saviour to show you what they mean. Then live on them. I mean put them in practice."

"Mrs. Gregory!" exclaimed the young man, "I will do everything you say; will you help me, will you teach me? Those people love you so dearly, it somehow showed me my deficiencies. What a terrible mistake it is to put such fellows as I in the ministry. I can answer certain theological questions according to a formula, but I cannot direct a poor woman to a certain hope."

"I cannot teach," replied Nettie, "for I know but

little. There is everything in God's word. You can read as well as I."

Such interviews were sought by Mr. Mills. Nettie was afraid to refuse her help, and yet there was an increasing interest in his teacher, that was a great annoyance to her. When, finally, he made it very clear to her that he was convinced that only as his wife could she be just the teacher he wanted, she started indignantly, reproaching herself for having received so many visits from him.

He waited patiently for her to recover from her surprise, but was surprised in his turn by her answer.

"You must have misunderstood me," she said, coolly, "I did not dare to refuse to aid you in your work, by telling you the little experience I have had. Surely in doing this I gave you no encouragement to suppose I had any deeper interest in you. You must know very little of women if you imagine the position of teacher to a husband would offer any attraction."

"But, my dear Mrs. Gregory, think of the good you may do through me——"

"We need not discuss this, Mr. Mills; I will endeavor to forget that you have ever thought of this matter. If in any way I have benefited you I am very glad; for the future you must seek other assistance," and Nettie was about to leave the room and the matter-of-fact lover with great dignity, when his dreary, hopeless face, roused her compassion; she stopped a moment, kindly offering her hand. "I will always be glad to hear of your welfare, and of your success, and I thank you for the implied compliment." He looked stupefied, but when he found himself alone, gathered his wits, with his hat and umbrella, and faced the storm within and without.

Nettie threw herself on her sofa for "a good cry."

She tried to blame herself, but could not see how she could have acted differently. "Its uncomfortable living in this unprotected sort of way," she thought. "Alice and Will are so hard to guide, and I will be meeting this man constantly, and I ought to begin to visit a little——. Come in," a knock disturbed her. The maid handed a telegram. How every one dreads a telegram! Nettie turned it over many times before she opened it. Alice came to hear if there was anything important. "You foolish child, don't you see it is from Hanwell. Sir John is coming, I am sure."

"Open it, Alice. I know there is some sorrow in it."

"Oh, Nettie! He is dead! Dear, good, kind Sir John; only a few days' illness."

Yes, there was sorrow in it, and Nettie and Alice mourned as for a father. There was real grief at the cottage now. The storm had struck "the happy valley;" clouds and darkness overhung its beauty.

Mr. Mills appeared again, and in some bitterness said, "Take the comfort home to your own heart that you have given others."

Then Nettie learned a deeper lesson. He was safe. He was happy. He was at rest, but this did not take away the loneliness. We have not reached the self-abnegation yet that can rejoice even if the dear one is at home.

They bore it for a while, then Alice said, "He wanted us to travel; suppose we go, Nettie. A year's holiday will not hurt Will and Kate. Mr. Selwyn can make arrangements for us; he knows an excellent courier——"

"Thank you, Alice, for suggesting it. It will be best. Write to Mr. Selwyn."

"You blessed child!" exclaimed her cousin, "I ex-

pected to be crushed by a dignified negative, but you are delightful, positively delightful. Will! Kate! we are going to the Continent!"

"When, Alice, when? to-morrow?"

"No, not to-morrow; next week, perhaps."

Nettie started at this, but made no objection.

CHAPTER XVI.

No replies to letters for so many years would have discouraged a man of different temperament from Henry Mason. He had prepared himself for that very difficulty; he knew that Mrs. Stepney could not have long to live, and that there was very little hope of Nettie's seeing his letters. He continued to write with a sort of dogged perseverance, feeling that at least there would be a record of his hard work that might by some chance be known to her *sometime*. That indefinite "sometime" had been his only star of hope.

Conscientious in every smallest matter, Henry, in this great sorrow of his life, faced the trouble bravely, and placed before his mind and heart the exact position. He honestly shut out from his heart the present image of Nettie, determinately considering her the wife of another man. He gave up the thought of her being his in her youthful loveliness. He thought of her only as a possible future, a widow, doubtless sadly changed in appearance, perhaps middle-aged and gray-haired, with weary eyes and chastened spirits. Many times he tried to fancy just such a picture. "Will I love her?" he asked himself. "Yes, to the very end of life, she will be dear to me," and then he would start from his reverie and go on with life again.

Mr. Cowell he looked upon as the guardian of his property. Sure to die before many years. It was an extraordinary position, one, the right of which was many times debated by the young man, but which he accepted as a necessity.

"She had to marry him ; I must wait till she is free again. It was a horrible fate, but there was no help for it," and then again he would shake off the incubus, and struggle with his adverse fortunes with what heart he could put into his work.

Years had passed in a series of failures. The railroad company to which Colonel Henderson sent his nephew failed utterly. He obtained another situation before his money was spent. The salary hardly sufficed to lodge him. He would not ask his uncle for help, and a stranger in his native land he struggled on. At last his untiring energy gave him a reputation ; he found work farther west, and was better paid. Every dollar he could save was carefully laid aside ; every hope was retailed to Mrs. Stepney, every fear was hidden and crushed. It was the second year before he had any answer; then a strange hand informed him that Mrs. Stepney was dead, that Mrs. Cowell was well, and enduring her life as bravely as she could, but that he must continue to write to Mrs. Stepney, and by no means to admit any knowledge of her death or of any circumstances in regard to Mrs. Cowell. That this was written without the knowledge of either Mr. or Mrs. Cowell. There was no signature, and never was mortal more puzzled than Henry. He did not venture to disregard the advice, and wrote as before, though less frequently, often wondering whether Nettie's eyes ever rested on his words.

Time passes even in a prison, and as surely for a prisoned heart, so the years did regularly roll on. In the autumn after Sir John Conolly's death a sudden summons from his uncle's lawyer informed him of the death of Colonel Henderson, and that from being a clerk in a railroad office, he was the heir of all his uncle's property. In fact he was the last of the line.

He made no delay in his preparations to return to England. That delightful sensation that it is given to some patient and weary souls to know, had come to him. *Something* had happened at last. The long lane had turned, and the vestibule of his future was reached.

The iron horse was a laggard in his gait, he thought, as night and day he rushed toward the Atlantic coast. Not a moment was lost; he had telegraphed for a stateroom in the steamer. Yes, a whole stateroom; he was a rich man now, and would have one to himself, if possible, for he must think and plan for the future. If he only knew about Nettie's fate! "Is she alive? Is she wife or widow? Is she changed? Will I find her still beautiful! She will be Nettie, my darling, if not a ray of her former loveliness is left." It was not so very long after all; why did he so persistently try to convince himself that she would look so unlike herself! I, who knew all about them both, wished he could have seen her on that September day. She was sailing on the stormy channel, and pitying the anguished faces around her. She stood in the fresh gale, a bright color mantled her cheeks, her eyes were full of expectancy, her brown curls were just long enough to be tossed in lovely confusion.

If she were changed, it was to a woman of such exceeding loveliness that one would have wondered if she could ever have been more beautiful. Alice, too, was scarcely less lovely, but her beauty was of a very different type. Her eyes were always dancing with merriment, her mouth was never still. If she were not talking, she looked as if she could not wait another moment for the opportunity. But I have left Henry, who reached Liverpool just ten days after Mrs. Gregory and her party left Dover. His luggage was despatched to "The Oaks," as soon as he landed, and he, only wait-

ing for coffee and rolls at the Waverly, was travelling south to Southampton.

He sprang out upon the platform. The impetuous American, with a pocket full of gold, was at once recognized by the porter.

"A fly, sir? 'ere is one, fast 'orse, sir."

"Yes," said Henry, "drive to Cowell House."

The porter understood the wink from the driver, and put the portmanteau up beside him. After Henry had driven a short distance, the man turned and said, "'Spose you know the folk's ain't livin' there now?"

"Who is dead?" demanded Henry.

"Old Mr. Cowell died more'n a year ago, may be nigh two years."

He could hardly speak, but managed to ask, "Where is Mrs. Cowell?"

"'Don' know, sir. She moved away. Some say the house was haunted, some say she was took to a 'Sylum; can't say for certain."

"Asylum! What on earth for?"

The man touched his head significantly, and Henry felt the world "go 'round." It was spinning around, this once firm earth. "Drive on," was all he said. They reached the gate. "For sale," was conspicuously visible on a board fastened to a tree. They drove into the deserted grounds. The house was closed, but a woman answered the impatient peal of the bell. She asked him in and dusted a chair in the hall for him before she tried to answer his questions. "I didn't know the family, sir. I only lately come to this part of the country. Miss Jones hired me. I had a good recommend, and Miss Jones put me here to keep the 'ouse aired. The cook was here before me, but she went to live with a family a mile away."

"Give me the name, and tell the driver where to go."

She gave the directions, received her bonus, and courtesied her appreciation.

"What became of the housekeeper?" he asked of the driver.

"Don' no, sir. They all chased off after the funeral. There was some talk about things not bein' all right, but they was folks as kept to themselves, and nobody knew for sartain."

The cook was at home. Yes, she knew all about everything and this was her story:

"Mrs. Cowell was a beautiful young lady, but she was too put upon. No saint could a stood it. The hold man was that queer, nobody could live with 'im. Miss Jones, the 'ousekeeper, had a way of managin' him, and she was greatly set on Mrs. Cowell. Many's the cup of coffee I've made all in a 'urry for her to take to her when she was reglar wore out with his 'atefulness. After a while Mrs. Cowell began to have screeching and laffin' turns, an' the hold man used to shake his hold 'ead and stop his ears. So Saunders, the butler, told me. Then, one day Miss Jones, she hordered a big dinner for company, an' Saunders, says he, 'I mistrust them men a dinin' 'ere to-day.' 'What's amiss with them?' says I. 'If they ain't blackguards, I'll eat my 'ead,' says he. 'They're 'ere on no good. I believe the hold beast,' savin' your presence, sir, 'is agoin' to send Mrs. Cowell to some 'Sylum.' 'Good Lor,' says I, 'Miss Jones won't never have it.' Well, that night, Mr. Cowell was took with pallerisses, and never spoke no more nor swallered for two weeks, an' then he died, an' good enuf it was for 'im too——"

"But—Mrs. Cowell, what of her?"

"I really can't say. She was took away in the night, and none of us knowed it till mornin', when Jane came down all of a fluster, and said she was took away."

"Where to?" asked Henry, trying to steady himself.

"Can't say, sir. She had a fever, I heard, an' Miss Jones had a new doctor for her; whether he took her, or the blackguards took her, neither James, nor Saunders, nor Jane, nor I knew. Miss Jones never said anything, only she was safe, an' had gone away with friends. Then Mr. Cowell died, and all the servants was dismissed but me. I took care of the 'ouse, but it was too lonely, so I sent word to Mr. Selwyn, the lawyer, an' he told me I might go. After that a strange woman was put there, but I sort of mistrust the house an' ain't never been there since; there was talk of ghosts, an' sure, if any old sinner deserved to be 'aunted, it was old Mr. Cowell."

All this only added to Henry's distress and perplexity. He drove back to Southampton, telegraphed to his uncle's lawyer that he would be detained a day or two, took rooms at the hotel, and determined to find out something before he left Hampshire. He told the landlord that he was an old friend of Mrs. Cowell, but did not know her address. Unfortunately this worthy man, who also recognized the reckless American with an open purse, had only been in Southampton for six months, but he suggested an interview with one of the clergy. The one who buried Mr. Cowell was discovered. Yes, he knew Mr. Cowell. The funeral was only attended by Mr. Selwyn, Mr. Cowell's lawyer; Mr. Marvin, the medical man; and Miss Jones, the housekeeper. He remembered it because Mr. Cowell was known to be rich, although he sold his flowers—and the rich usually have many mourners. Occasionally Mrs. Cowell had attended church, but he was never admitted when he called. He heard of her illness, and that she had gone to her friends. Sir John Conolly might have known something of it, if there was any brain trouble. He was visiting near Southampton about that time, but he died in March. Mr.

Cowell died two years before. He wished he could tell more. It was known that Mr. Cowell married a beautiful young girl, but the few persons who ventured to go to see her were made to understand that they were not welcome. For some unknown reason Mrs. Cowell was rarely seen; she never made purchases in the shops, and, coming so seldom to church, the interest and gossip died out. That was all that could be elicited from the good clergyman. The medical man was next sought—Mr. Marvin. He very willingly told all he knew, and Henry carefully entered every new item in his notebook. He was called to Mr. Cowell, who was very suddenly paralyzed. He found Sir John Conolly in attendance upon Mrs. Cowell, who had brain fever. Marvin attended Mr. Cowell for two weeks, rarely saw Miss Jones, the housekeeper, but knew she was in the house. The valet, Saunders, who took care of Mr. Cowell, said Mrs. Cowell had gone to her friends; that Sir John thought the noise and confusion of Mr. Cowell's illness and funeral would be bad for her. Whether Sir John went with Mrs. Cowell, Saunders did not say, and Mr. Marvin had asked no questions. Did not hear anything of an insane asylum till after all was over. If Sir John took her to Hanwell, she was safe under his care. This was more satisfactory; the "blackguards" began to disappear, but the possible derangement was a terrible matter, particularly when connected with the thought of what cruelty might have produced it. The lawyer, Mr. Selwyn, had moved to London—so Mr. Marvin informed him. He courteously promised to make further inquiries, and to write to Mr. Mason at "The Oaks." That night Henry wrote to Hanwell and to Mr. Selwyn, giving his address. The following morning he left Southampton for the lake district.

CHAPTER XVII.

Mr. Podgson was "taking the air," that is, was sunning himself on the little porch of the gate-house. This house had been unoccupied for some time, and Mr. Podgson formed the habit of indulging there in countless cigars and reveries, while sitting alone and idle after the death of the colonel. He had very vague ideas of the length of time it would take "young Mr. Hennery," to reach "The Oaks," for although he knew that steamers brought the "Hamericas" within a few weeks, he "hunderstood that Mr. Hennery was not on the hilands, but in the hinterior, so to speak," but the length and breadth of the "hinterior" was beyond his computation. Therefore, quite ignorant of Mr. Mason's arrival, the good Podgson sat serenely upon the porch considering his future prospects. A misfortune, common to all men, had befallen him. A new and radiantly beautiful housemaid had recently appeared in Mrs. Deems' apartments, to take the place of Mary, who was married. Mr. Podgson was *in love* with the new beauty—but Mr. Podgson was always in love, more or less. The sensation, if that word is descriptive of the delight experienced by the butler, was becoming more and more fascinating to him. He took it out, and looked admiringly at it, he examined it carefully, lest there might be something that would turn again and rend him, he smoothed it down and caressed it—I am speaking of the sensation, not of the object of his love; please note this, for Podgson was nothing if not proper.

He revelled in the warmth and blessings that the presence of the sensation produced in his "hinterior," which was by no means as boundless as that in which "Mr. Hennery" resided. He was a philosopher, and was fully aware that his present feeling would pass away as previous feelings had done. He regretted to lose the delicious sensation; while he had it he enjoyed it, but he sighed as he knew that he would probably treat it as he had always done its predecessors. He was in the habit of taking his love—I mean the *sensation*, remember—and exposing it to the air, while he subjected it to examinations, and this had the effect of cooling it toward the object, and centering it on itself, until it became a thing apart, so that he could calmly witness the arrival of a Jones or Smith, and serenely bestow the "object" upon the happy man in a most fatherly and "bless you my children" manner.

Mr. Podgson sighed as he thought how often this had been the end of his dreams. He sighed deeper as he thought of his gray hair, and deepest and most profoundly as he thought of his portly form that required new measurements by the tailor each year. Yes, in the midst of pleasurable sensations, Mr. Podgson had cause for three sighs.

"It may 'ave been a mistake," he said; "I was formed for domestic 'appiness, but I may as well confess it, the hassociations hof my life hup-stairs, make it himpossible for me to subjoin myself to a person in the spear to which I hactually belong; it is my misfortune, so to speak," and three more sighs followed their predecessors, and fairly lifted him from his chair in self-pity, until he was ready to wear crape at the funeral of his dead hopes. This depth of sentimentality had its enjoyment, and reminded the good butler that he had not seen the lovely Nora for several hours,

so he sought the housekeeper's room, and might have been able to indemnify himself for his sorrows, if a tremendous peal at the door-bell had not startled him.

"Run, James!" he heard Mrs. Deems exclaim to one of the footmen, as she in much trepidation rushed in the room and sank panting on a chair. "It rang just like the colonel; oh dear! oh dear!" she sobbed.

"Lor'!" said Mr. Podgson, "don't take on like that. If it were the colonel 'imself he wouldn't 'urt us."

"I'm that afraid of ghosts," replied the good woman, "you could knock me down with a feather."

"Listen!" said the butler, "its the nevvy sure enuf. 'Owever he got 'ere so soon from the Hamericas I can't see. I'll go, Mrs. Deems," and Podgson scurried off to his duty as master of ceremonies.

Henry Mason was standing beside the table, where years before he had parted with his uncle. The scene was indelibly impressed upon him. The old man almost beside himself with rage, his figure and red face projected against the background of a superbly carved oak mantel, in front of which he stood; the blazing wood fire, the view from the windows, of lawn and trees, and calm blue lake, how it all came back to him. "If I had been more patient, perhaps I need not have had this terrible sorrow now, for what are houses and lands without my darling, my Nettie!" What availed being "monarch of all he surveyed," if, like poor Selkirk, he were alone? He could have put his head down on the table and wept, if a loud "Hem!" had not roused him. He turned, and Podgson's rotundity and impassive face were before him. Podgson did not know whether "Mr. Hennery" would be sorry or glad, so he deferred the arrangement of his features till he should discover in what direction his sympathies might be

needed. Sadness being the prominent expression, Podgson became sad and sorrowful.

"At your service, Mr. Mason," he said.

"Oh, yes, I remember, my uncle's butler, I believe," stammered Mr. Mason.

"Your butler, I hope sir."

"Yes, indeed; but it is hard for me to realize—Pogen——"

"Podgson, if you please sir."

"Yes, Podgson. I cannot realize that my uncle is gone, and that I am his heir; we parted in this room."

"Yessir; death hovertakes great and small;" here Podgson sighed one of his best Sunday sighs, the kind he kept for his weekly assertion that he was a "miserable sinner." "The colonel was, so to speak, flustered that day. He regretted to his dying day them 'asty words;" this was original and poetical on Podgson's part, "but it is not in Hindian hofficers to 'umble theirselves, so to speak. You'll not bear no grudge against 'im I'm sure, sir."

"No, Podgson, of course not. I really knew very little of him. It was very good in him to remember me."

"Yessir; placing you in his shoes, so to speak. We were 'ardly 'oping for you so immediate, but you will find everything to your 'and. The colonel's horders was to leave hall things till you should come. What will you be pleased to horder sir? Shall I show you the rooms, sir; we harranged a suite on the south side."

"Thank you, I may only be here a few days now; it depends on letters that I expect from London, where I have business. Send for Mr. Lemon; he had better dine with me at seven, if possible, as I may leave tomorrow, if I should be telegraphed for."

Henry remembered that seven was his uncle's dining hour, and flattering himself that he had acquitted

himself with dignity, he took a hasty survey of his rooms, and then went outside to "view his lands," and quiet his perturbed spirit.

A more bewildered young man could hardly have been found. The change was sudden, and the happiness it might have brought him had been swept away in his bitter disappointment and terrible dread as to what had befallen Nettie. He must see his uncle's lawyer, leave the place in his charge, and then rest neither day nor night until he found her. He reviewed the information he received, and in dividing the important and unimportant, decided that the housekeeper would probably remain with Nettie, and that his search must be for Miss Jones and Mrs. Cowell. The death of Sir John Conolly deprived him of a certain source of information, but the men spoken of as the "blackguards" were to be looked for. Revolving these thoughts as he walked through the grounds, he was attracted and interested in the care and taste that were everywhere visible. The estate was neither rich nor large, except comparatively. The house was fine and superbly situated, and with its surroundings, to one fresh from the unfinished "West," it seemed princely. Some natural pride came to him, as its owner, as he wandered on through flower-gardens, shrubberies, over the smooth lawns, though he had a strange sense of unreality, till at last he felt more at ease in an old orchard which was in rather a more natural condition than the other portions of the grounds. There he found a seat, and, glad to be alone, he, like Podgson, took out his trouble and looked at it on all sides. For a few moments he had been interested in his surroundings, but then the heart-sinking came back with renewed force. He could not affect regret for his uncle; he had neither been kind nor just, and many years of

uncertainty and of hard work had been a poor preparation either for the enjoyment or for the wise use of the property. Back went his thoughts to his childhood. He remembered a home where poverty was made light of, where happiness triumphed over want. He remembered that he learned then how to make the best of everything, and, like Colonel Sellers, to praise "the beautiful bead" on the plain, cold water. He had faith in human nature then, and thought that love was the universal law. Then a sorrow came, his mother died, and he was sent with a heart tender with its first grief, to buffet the cruel boy-world in a public school. He was laughed at for his efforts to do right, jeered at for his truthfulness, persecuted for his honor. He was a brave boy, making no complaints to his father, who labored for their mutual support, but his young brow knitted under injustice, and school-life was bitter to him. Home was not what it had been ; the life-struggle was not so cheerfully borne ; there was no bright spirit to illumine its gloom ; only the man and the boy, one weary over his easel, the other over his tasks ; one looking back to a day of insults and tyranny, the other looking forward to another day of work and weariness.

Then the father died. He had never had much force of character ; he was amiable and trusting. The boy was the stronger of the two. The father had no relatives, and left but a small sum of money. He bade the boy write to his uncle, whose address was among the family archives. This he did, and following the advice of the landlady with whom they boarded, and who was very kind to him, he waited the answer before making any plans to support himself. The rest the reader knows. His uncle sent for him, and with the Stepneys he found a home. All this came back to him.

The life had not been a long one, but to him who had lived it, it was full of incident and interest. Now his care for his support was over; he could live where and as he liked, within moderate bounds. Nettie was free and surely true to him, but where? It was all very wonderful to have this inheritance, but, as Napoleon is recorded to have said, the world was divided in two parts. To Henry, where he was, was one part, where Nettie was, was the other. Where she was, and where she was not. This was all of life to him, and summed up his sorrow and his hope.

One of the men came to summon him. Mr. Lemon had come; dinner was ready to be served. He hastened home. The lawyer received the young man courteously, and curiously eyed the young American who he considered had more cause for joy than for sorrow, and yet whose face bore such unmistakable evidence of anxiety. They conversed on general topics during the superintendence of Podgson, but after dinner, Henry, who was too restless to remain indoors, proposed a walk in the moonlight with their cigars.

Mr. Lemon explained the condition of the property, and hoped Mr. Mason would reside at "The Oaks."

"Cannot all go on as it is? I have business that I cannot defer," asked Henry.

"Certainly," replied Mr. Lemon; "the servants can remain and be fully trusted, while I will have a general supervision till your return;" but he thought this a cool and careless way of dismissing the subject.

Henry hesitated a moment, and then told him what he feared and hoped, and that until Mrs. Cowell was found he could not rest. His interest in her was put on the fact of his having lived for so many years with Mrs. Stepney, and, in fact, feeling for her as for a mother. The idea that Mrs. Cowell was really a sub-

ject for an insane asylum he would not admit, but feared she might have been placed in one. Mr. Lemon was deeply interested, and had no trouble in reading between the lines. He advised seeing Mr. Selwyn as soon as possible, and offered to accompany his young friend. Henry preferred going alone, but promised to send if he needed assistance.

The morning's mail brought letters from London, one telling that Mr. Selwyn was travelling on the Continent; at present his address was Rome, where letters were to await him. When he went away for rest he rarely permitted his letters to find him until he was ready for them. The other letter proved clearly that Mrs. Cowell had never been at Hanwell. A third was from Mr. Marvin, the physician in Southampton, who "had reason to believe Mrs. Cowell was taken to a private asylum, kept by a man named Adam, situated a few miles off the line." He gave the address. He had certain information that this man dined with Mr. Cowell, and that Mrs. Cowell was taken away in the night, a short time after. The housekeeper, Miss Jones, seemed to have control of everything after Mr. Cowell's death, and instead of leaving any address at the post-office, she went there for letters occasionally. The postmaster said that no letters had come for any of the family for the last six months.

This was very much like the information received from the cook, from whom Henry thought Marvin might have obtained it, as there could not have been time for very thorough researches. He consulted Mr. Lemon, who agreed that the private asylum must be examined. It was better to try first as a friend making inquiries; the law might be brought to bear upon the matter somewhat later. His success we will leave for another chapter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Mr. Mason found the asylum, and was admitted to the office, where he was received by Dr. Wildman, a middle-aged man, with an immense assumption of importance, a very bad face, and eagle eyes that were somewhat toned down by glasses with uncommonly wide, gold rims. The errand of the visitor was soon told. "To inquire in regard to a Mrs. Cowell, who, in 1864, had been received, and was now probably an inmate."

"A Mrs. Cowell; ah, yes—I apprehend I can assist you—yes—Mr. Seaman, the books of '64, if you please. Unfortunately," he said, as he turned the pages, "the assistant of that year was a little careless as to dates. C— Co— yes, here it is—no, I am in error. No such name entered at that time. I was misled by 'Cowing' —are you sure you mean 'Cowell?'"

"Perfectly sure," said Henry.

"I certainly do remember Adam telling me of an application from a Cowell, a flower man—Seaman, call Mr. James."

Mr. James appeared.

"Did we ever have a Mrs. Cowell here?"

"Yes; she died."

Henry turned deadly pale.

"My dear sir," said the observant Wildman, looking over his glasses, "these things are common to all men. I sympathize deeply—a friend of yours, I conclude. Yes, she died. What date, Mr. James?"

"Before 1855, I think."

"Books of 1855–56, Mr. Seaman; yes, here it is. Cowell, aged twenty-three, wife of E. G. Cowell. Is that the party?"

Henry breathed again. "The lady for whom I am inquiring did not marry Mr. Cowell till 1859 or '60."

"Ah, that is strange; there must have been a previous marriage. In fact, I can only account for possible errors by inaccuracy of the assistant. Some of the books were burned by—a—patient—and the entire list re-written from memory and the half-burned papers. From what I remember hearing, a Mrs. Cowell was brought here before I came, and died; the exact date I cannot find."

"But, my dear sir, it is of immense importance to me to know which of the dates refers to Mrs. Cowell of 1864, only two years ago. Certainly some one can remember, and the lady I wish to find was not Mrs. Cowell in 1855."

"That settles it, then; the date must be wrong, unless Cowell had two wives; even then, they would hardly both be insane."

"Is there no one here who can verify the dates? Where is Adam himself?"

"He is in America. Every assistant of his but Mr. James has left. I have been in charge for eighteen months. There was no one among the patients bearing the name of Cowell. But—perhaps you are not aware that under—er—er—certain circumstances, patients are entered under fictitious names, for the sake of the family; you understand, doubtless."

"I cannot understand the use of a lie under any circumstances."

Dr. Wildman drummed on the table with his fingers; such lunacy did not come under curable cases, and the interview was rather tedious to him.

"Can you give me no further information?"

"I have just thought of some one who may help you —one of the experts who only left a short time ago; he was with Adam for years; I will write it—Mr. Worth, London, Mersey Street, No. 16. He may know something."

"Thank you," exclaimed Henry, seizing the paper as if it contained a reprieve from a death-warrant. Then a new thought struck him. "If Mrs. Cowell is here now, some one must pay her expenses."

"Of course," replied Dr. Wildman, with a worse expression than before darkening his face, "which proves that she is *not* here; or, having been here, that she is dead, or that she is known by another name." He thought it was time to settle this persistent young man, and he did settle him, for Henry bowed and went in search of 16 Mersey Street, London.

London, and Mersey Street, and Mr. Worth were easily found. A modest sign informed the inquiring public that the office-hours were from three to five. Henry had hit upon the proper time, and was civilly received by Mr. Worth.

"I am directed to you by Dr. Wildman, for information in regard to a Mrs. Cowell, whom I have reason to believe was placed in the asylum in the spring of 1864. The books are confused, and I cannot obtain any certain account."

"Ah! ah! indeed! I am very sorry to hear it. I was called to see a Mrs. Cowell, in company with Dr. Adam, in that year, a short time before I left the asylum. She was then suffering under strong nervous excitement. I remember the circumstances. My partner thought it a case of temporary aberration."

"Please favor me with all you can recall of the circumstances."

"We were sent for by Mr. Cowell, who resided near Southampton. He seemed to be in deep grief about the condition of his wife, who, he said, gave evidences of insanity. We were invited to dinner, and introduced as friends of Mr. Cowell's, being told to watch her carefully. Mr. Cowell seemed devoted to her, and much distressed; but I thought the subjects that he chose to converse upon were very unwise, as they were such as evidently excited her greatly. I remember he talked about her brother and sister, whom, it appeared, she had not seen for a long time, and referred, also, to her mother's death. He probably did this to show her condition, as she laughed immoderately at everything, her eyes shone, and her face was flushed."

"Was any other person present?"

"Yes, the housekeeper, Miss Jones, a lady whom I thought wore a green shade as a disguise. We get in the habit of discovering such things. I detected her several times trying to quiet Mrs. Cowell, and was sure that she suspected our errand. After dinner Mrs. Cowell put her hand to her head in a bewildered sort of way, and left the room. Then we talked it over, and Mr. Cowell decided to have her removed the following week."

"Well—what then?" for Mr. Worth stopped abruptly.

"Adam went for her, at the time appointed; the house was in some confusion, Mr. Cowell was paralyzed, Miss Jones was in charge, and said that Mrs. Cowell had disappeared. Adam had no warrant to search the house, and thought Cowell might die and Mrs. Cowell be left on his hands, so he went back again. Certainly Mrs. Cowell was not with him on his return, but I objected to certain features of the asylum

management, and had a quarrel with Adam, so that I left soon after, and cannot tell whether Mrs. Cowell went there later. Then Adam got into trouble and went to America. His real name was Matson."

"Mr. Cowell died so soon after this, that I do not think she could have been sent there. She was not taken to Hanwell, and, in fact, I cannot trace her."

"Will not the books help you?"

"No, they are confused."

"I remember, were burned and rewritten from memory, but how does that affect 1864?"

"In this way. A Mrs. Cowell was once there, and died. You see they may have confused the dates."

"No Mrs. Cowell died while I was there; names were changed, however, but I do not think any Mrs. Cowell was there after 1864. Can you not trace her from her residence—some of the people around must know something about her. However, I remember Mr. Cowell said they had no intercourse with their neighbors. I asked him whether some society would not be better for his lady? He said she was never lonely; that he devoted his whole time to her. I felt sorry for her, she was so young, but my business was only to examine the cases. I have had to control my feelings before now. When we examined cases we assumed other names—mine was Warren."

"Did you consider Mrs. Cowell insane?"

The young man moved unsteadily, then replied, "No, I did not. I thought her on the verge of brain fever."

"And yet she would have been taken to an asylum!"

"That was not my affair. I gave my opinion to Adam, and that was the reason he did not take me with him when he went after her; in fact, I refused to go, and was glad enough when he did not bring her with him."

"That point, then, is certain; she did not enter the asylum."

"Not while I was there. She may have been sent afterward. If the matter is purposely confused, you will have a hard time. You had better get a detective to work it up for you. Go to Dobbins; he is a first-rate fellow, and honest, too."

So Henry went to Dobbins, who undertook the case, while the baffled lover returned to "The Oaks" to await the result. There was enough to do in examining his new possessions, to occupy the time. He conquered the hearts of Mrs. Deems and Mr. Podgson, liking everything, and praising everybody! This seemed a sort of relief to his heart, for he had an intense longing to make everyone happy with his new ability. It passed the hours for him till about four days after his return, when Dobbins appeared. This official was able to add but little to Henry's information. The same story was repeated, with the addition that a week or two after the death of Mr. Cowell Miss Jones, the housekeeper, took tickets for London; that while there she went several times to Hanwell, then left without saying where she was going. Mrs. Cowell was not with her. When she left London Mr. Selwyn left on the same day. Could not find out whether they went together. A box was sent from the Cowell House to her in London, addressed to a private hotel in Arlington Street. There it was redirected to Ambleside."

"Ambleside! near here?"

"Exactly," said Dobbins. "But I can't trace that box, because no one could remember who it was for. I have been to Ambleside, and no one knows anything of Miss Jones or Mrs. Cowell. If you know more than I do, young man, better make a clean breast of it.

I've lost my clew." And Dobbins looked disgusted with life.

"It is impossible for a family to be swept out of existence in two years; they must have gone to the Continent, or to Asia or Africa. I had some reason to fear that Mrs. Cowell had been taken to an insane asylum, but I think now it was not so."

"Whew!" said Dobbins; "if she was took there, you are in a case. Them is places as don't show their hands."

Henry explained it more fully to Dobbins, who, after deep thought, said: "How about that shaded woman, who's she? Seems she had pretty clear control over them all."

"I only know that she was Mr. Cowell's housekeeper, and naturally took charge after his death when his wife was away."

"If Sir John Conolly hadn't up and died, we'd have had it clear, but I should think a pestilence was after 'em the way they died or took flight."

"I want you to keep on, Dobbins; perhaps you can find out if they have gone abroad. By the way, if I knew where the children were at school, we might find out where they passed their vacations; no one about here seems to know Mrs. Cowell's name. Probably that box was not sent to her. But the children's school —can you try for that?"

"What was their names?"

"Kate and William Stepney."

"Are you sure they went to school?"

"No; I only know that Mrs. Cowell had not seen them for a long time."

"'Twould be a job to visit all the schools in England and on the Continent."

Henry sighed, and wished the world was only half

its size. His only hope was in Dobbins. There was, however, a mitigated form of misery or relief in talking over the *pros* and *cons* with Mr. Lemon. This kind friend knew all the neighborhood, and was sure that neither a Mrs. Cowell nor a Miss Jones had ever resided there.

"That proves the box was not sent to Mrs. Cowell."

"Exactly," replied Mr. Lemon; "and I advise you to travel. Your friend may be on the Continent. If so, that is the place to find her."

This was undeniable, and therefore they soon convinced each other that she had gone abroad, and that Mr. Mason could do nothing better than follow her, which he proceeded to do much more closely than he suspected.

CHAPTER XIX.

It would be a difficult matter to include in these pages any account of the erratic journey proposed by Alice, who, with Will, made exhaustive studies of various guide-books.

"We need not plan the routes," she wisely decided. "Mr. Selwyn says we need only tell Gennaro where we want to go, and he will land us on the spot."

"You talk as if we were cannon-balls, to be fired off," laughed Nettie, as they were deciding what to do first on the day after their arrival in Paris. "When will Gennaro be here?"

"Mr. Selwyn promised to see him as soon as possible, and to send him. Meanwhile, we can do a little sight-seeing on our own account. I rather miss that old fidget. I wish he had offered his services as courier instead of whisking off to Rome."

"We could not have gone travelling about under his escort," remarked the accepted head of the party.

"If he had turned into a *courier*, you rigid example, we might."

"He must have lodged with the servants, then," returned Will. "Try and live without him for a few months, my dear."

"Live without him, indeed! I wonder how often we have seen him in a year."

"I do not know how often *you* have seen him. Stop pulling my best hair. I was all gotten up to kill."

"I recognized you as ready for conquest," said Nettie.

"Order an open carriage, and we will drive in the Bois."

They were not as anxious about galleries and churches as they ought to have been, preferring to enjoy the delicious weather in driving rather than in sight-seeing, so that the few weeks passed in Paris were by no means educational. "We will do that part another time; the air is too lovely to be breathed inside of walls," was the united voice.

One day a letter came to Alice from Mr. Mills.

"Don't read it to me," said Nettie. "One reason of my coming here was to forget him and the annoyance he has been. Is there any news in it?"

Alice laughed. "How can I tell you if I am not to read it? No, there is nothing; it is only a long message to you. Widow Green misses you. The Beck children have whooping-cough. He is studying the Sermon on the Mount, and wishes to know whether you think we are to live literally according to its requirements. And here is something. Do you remember the gate-way with the vines, where there is such a lovely view of the lake? The owner died in August, you know. We never heard his name. Mr. Mills says some awfully rich American has taken possession. Why he tells us this I do not know, unless he supposes we may be induced to return."

"Carriage is ready, Nettie," said Will. "What is it? Bad news?"

"No, you absurd boy; only a letter from Mr. Mills to me."

"If he writes to Nettie I'll shoot him," remarked Master Stepney.

"There is no danger," said Nettie, in such a dreary voice that Alice wished she had not mentioned America.

In a few days Gennaro came. He proved to be all

that Mr. Selwyn represented—quiet, respectful, and thoroughly capable of taking charge of the party. He was somewhat bewildered by the number of places they wished to see before the winter, and passed some anxious hours over the problem of the seasons, but finally advised a slow journey toward South Italy and Naples, planning to reach Rome in time for the Christmas festivities. This was pronounced "jolly," and never did courier or tourists have a more delightful journey. Its only anxiety was borne by Nettie, in her continual dread of attracting attention. The others were so outspoken in their delight, so untiring in their excursions, Alice was so tall and so attractive, and Will and Kate so buoyant, that Mrs. Gregory's party was, without doubt, rather too demonstrative to please the taste of the average English critic. She did her best in striving to control them, entreating them to remember they were in public places, but with very small effect; some burst of laughter was always betraying their youthfulness, till Nettie could only do propriety behind her own veil, wearing it double whenever it was endurable, or when they seemed to be remarked.

"I was born in India, you know," said Alice, "and somehow forget my English stilts."

"What are they?" inquired Kate.

"Sticks on which English people mount when they proclaim their nationality," returned Alice, thereby greatly enlightening the child.

Kate possessed the usual inquiring mind of the average child, but Alice and Will talked so much and so fast, that by the time she was ready to ask an explanation of one subject they were ages off on another. Nettie tried to help her young sister, but was usually interrupted.

"*Do* stop teaching and prosing. It will burst upon her suddenly some day. You'll be surprised, Kate,

when all at once you know everything. Look at those rows of poplars, like sentinels guarding the fields. Dreary, don't you think?"

So Kate gazed upon the poplars, and wished that Alice would let Nettie tell her why certain drives were called "boulevards;" but no, they were travelling through *la belle* France then, and there was enough to talk of in the changing scenes. Gennaro elected to pass the first night at Dijon, where the best rooms of the Hotel de la Cloche were ready for them.

As they entered the gate of the town Alice exclaimed: "Paradise at last. Look, Nettie, '*Mendicité est défendu.*' Can it be possible that we have reached a land where there are no beggars, and that we live?"

"Is everybody rich here?" asked Kate.

"Now, Kate, see if you can find out for yourself. It's against the law to be poor, evidently; see if the law is regarded."

"I fancy the law is more against begging than beggary," said Nettie, prosaically; but Alice by that time was full of interest in the quaint old hotel and their rattling entrance into the court. My travellers, however, will never reach Naples if I tell of their journey to Marseilles, or enjoy with them the three glorious days on the Mediterranean. Four young people in perfect health, interested in everything, proved to be a party whose conversation was little else than exclamations of admiration and delight.

Will aired a little information in regard to the time when Rome spread her gigantic arms around the inland sea, but was promptly suppressed by Alice, who suggested that if they remembered what existed then and there it would be quite enough. "I hate the old Romans," she continued; "they were so cruel and so grasping. When we get to the Coliseum don't dare to

remind me of 'early Christians,' and of how the wild beasts enjoyed their meals. I positively forbid Spartacus at Pæstum, and that awful story about the prisoners from the Neapolitan prisons destroying the Christians. Do let us rejoice in the present and for once shut horrors from our thoughts."

Will retired behind his school-books. Then Naples; the bay; Capri, the cloud land, resting on its blue waters; Vesuvius with its pillar of cloud in the day and its pillar of fire in the night; the Villa Reale; the Chiaja—but why enumerate the familiar list? We all know how full each day is of new scenes, new joys, new thoughts. The weather proved too warm to remain long in the city; therefore, after a few days at the Victoria, Gennaro took them to Sorrento as a *point d'appui*, making excursions from that lovely spot.

Vesuvius, fortunately more peaceful than usual, gave them a day for several reasons never to be forgotten. As they were driving up to the little inn where the donkeys were waiting, Will reminded Nettie of a china figure in her possession and insisted that their mother had told them something about Vesuvius in regard to it. For some time Nettie could not recall it; at last she remembered they were told that the figure, which was of an old priest carrying a basket of wine bottles, represented the one who would offer refreshments if they ever ascended Vesuvius. "I remember it all now!" she exclaimed; "mamma said, 'If you ever go there be sure to look for him.' Thank you, Will, for reminding me."

"Hope you don't object, Alice, to this bit of family history," remarked Will.

"By no means, my dear; find your old priest and get some of his wine. I have learned to like the fruity flavors."

They drove to the garden; Gennaro prepared the little table for them in the arbor. "I did not bring the wine," he said; "we do buy it here."

"Priest expected," said Will, indistinctly, from the middle of an orange.

"Sure enough, there he is!" said Alice.

"Isn't half as good-looking or as fat as he was in china," mumbled Will.

He was good-natured, however, and offered his wine from just such a basket as the one carried by their china priest. Gennaro selected the best, Nettie insisted on paying double for it, which generosity produced such beaming smiles that Will, who actually ceased eating in surprise at seeing the original of their mantel ornament, said, "Give him another dollar, Nettie; he expanded so much on that one, I know one more will blow him up to the size of our old fellow." They had a good deal of amusement over this (an actual occurrence), and Gennaro said he would tell the father about it some other time; another party were arriving and they must hasten to procure the best donkeys.

The other party consisted of a clerical-looking personage, with his wife and daughter, accompanied by a remarkably tall and fine-looking man. On this arrival Nettie's veil came down as she followed her merry party. They had the usual experiences and difficulties in ascending the mountain, and were struck with a cold wind and chill when they reached the top. A rain of the previous night made everything wet and uncomfortable; they gazed into the crater, heard all the explanations of the guides, wondered and exclaimed, collected lava, had hard work to keep Will from going into the crater, and then realized that their boots were wet through. Nettie looked in dismay at Kate's. "She will certainly take cold," she said, in some anxiety.

"We are all in the same box," said Alice. "Perhaps Will will take them down to that furnace for us and dry them."

"Not I," said Will. "I've changed my mind. Here is a lovely crack in the ground, with hot steam coming up; let us all sit on the edge and hang our feet down."

They were alone on the mountain, so Nettie did not reprove the shouts of laughter with which they accepted this relief, but with the others sat on the edge, her boots in the hot air. Will added oranges to the entertainment, and, quite forgetting the other party, who might come at any moment, they enjoyed their usual jokes. The spirit of mischief assailed Signorino Stepperne, as Gennaro called him. "Look out!" he shouted, "the crack is shutting up; you'll all be fastened in!"

The oranges flew one way, the three girls tumbled over the other, only interested in rescuing their feet, all screaming as women do. Gennaro ran to the rescue, lifting up the signora with tenderest care.

"There is not a danger," he said.

"Not the slightest," said the clergyman, who with his party reached the summit just at this crisis, and hastened to pick up the ladies.

Will ran off, Kate after him, Alice was laughing to suffocation, while poor Nettie, quickly doubling her veil, tried to explain both why they were in the crack, and why they were out of it, but with such evident embarrassment that the ladies of the party turned away to relieve her, joining the tall man, whose services not being needed, was trying to gaze serenely upon the boiling and bubbling furnaces below them. It all happened in a moment, they bowed and separated, leaving Nettie ready to cry with vexation. She hastened Gennaro to return. Nothing was said till after the race down the

cone of the mountain; then, as they mounted the donkeys, Will pleasantly informed his sister that Kate's veil blew toward the crater and then into it, and that "the tall fellow said he was going down and would get it."

"Oh, Will, I hope you told him it was no matter."

"Not I. He was laughing so at the remarkable sight of two middle-aged females lying prostrate at his feet, heads down, boots up, to put it mildly, that he did not dare to approach one of us. Gennaro told me about the veil."

"Middle-aged females, indeed!" exclaimed Alice. "You'll suffer for your performances to-day, my boy."

Nettie was past speaking. A dead silence fell on the party until they were in the carriage driving to Sorrento; then—

"Alice, wasn't it *too* dreadful?"

"Entirely too dreadful."

"What must they think of us?"

"I cannot imagine."

"I tried to explain."

"Ye-es, but you did not make it very clear."

"Oh, Alice, do say something comforting."

"It's beyond me, Nettie. The man is a clergyman; perhaps he will, in a Christian spirit, place himself in our position, and realize that we did our best to get out of the hole."

"But the other man, Alice?"

"He ran off. He is a coward."

"No such thing, Alice," put in Will. "He is struggling even now with the fumes of sulphur to save Kate's veil. I doubt if he ever returns. Besides, if you could have seen yourselves as others saw you—" and here Will went into such shouts of laughter that he could say no more.

"I'll never forget as I was lying on my back, in that

instant's struggle to turn over, the view of the faces looking down upon me—Gennaro's and the clergyman's!" pathetically said Nettie.

"I was wickedly neglected," said Alice; "you had two admirers to help you."

"*Admirers!* I like that," said Will.

"Why did the tall man go off?" asked Kate.

"My little love," explained Will, tenderly, "the tall man is a person of deep feeling; he could not endure to look upon two such *very* young ladies in a reversed position. It upset his preconceived views of propriety. He turned away his head and pretended that nothing had happened. The one crater attracted his attention, the two craters——"

"Pray don't be so vulgar as to try to make such silly puns, and do stop talking about it. I must forget it," said Nettie.

"Yes—'pun honor!"

Alice and Nettie refused to notice the aggravating sinner, who finally joined Gennaro on the outside of the carriage, while the others relapsed into silence.

They heard no more of the party to whom they really had afforded great amusement. Kate's veil was not restored.

"The tall fellow perished, evidently," was Will's comment.

Nettie would not refer to the disastrous day, and by degrees new sights and interests filled their minds. Gennaro was indefatigable and inexhaustible in resources; every day was filled with pleasure.

"If the signora pleases, to-morrow will be propitious to see the Blue Grotto and Capri," he said one evening.

"The signora" pleased, and the plans were made for the excursion.

CHAPTER XX.

"CAPRI, CAPRI, to-day!" exclaimed Kate, as she jumped from her little gray donkey after the early morning ride, which she and her brother always took before breakfast.

"Si, si," said Gennaro; "but you have not yet a breakfast. We go at ten of time."

"I don't want anything to eat; we had such lots of oranges," said Kate.

"I do, then. I could eat a paving-stone. Come along, don't be silly, and pretend you are not hungry. There's Nettie. Be off, you ridiculous apologies for horses!" This direction being emphasized by a crack of Will's whip, the donkeys trotted off without delay. Kate followed her hungry brother inside, where Nettie and Alice were good-naturedly waiting for them.

"You blessed child," said Nettie, kissing the bright face; "your rosy cheeks do my heart good."

"Being a contrast to their pale-green hue when she came from school. Is not red the complementary color of green? By the by, Kate, did you live on spinach and green fruit at school? No matter; don't try to answer, my dear; never speak when you are eating in that rapid way. Nettie, give me your unbiased opinion, was there ever anything invented so delightful as this free-and-easy life? No wonder that red cheeks are the rule; yours are beginning to show symptoms of color. I do think the independence of travelling with a hired man to bear all burdens is simply perfect." Thus, Alice.

"Yes," laughed Nettie; "husbands and brothers bully one so, and as a man seems necessary to make arrangements and to do the fighting, I must acknowledge the comfort of having one under orders."

"You always order me 'round," remarked Will.

"Not as I do Gennaro, nor at all with the same delightful assurance that the harder the task the more intense the happiness I shower upon him. Whether he is sincere or not I cannot tell, but I find myself accepting the position and positively believing that no greater pleasure can be bestowed on mortal man than that of executing my orders."

"On, *that* 'mortal man,'" corrected Will.

"Yes, if you like," returned his sister; "you appreciate the difference in my feeling, I see. I am never sure that you enjoy my orders."

"If he does I would issue a few in regard to oranges. To my certain knowledge he devoured six before breakfast; now six mandarins have followed them, to say nothing of a plate of rolls, and in fact nearly everything else," said Alice.

"It takes lots of food to manufacture those red cheeks that make Nettie so happy," replied Will, looking around for more worlds to conquer.

"We didn't have much at school," said Kate, "and Will is making up for it."

"Eat away, my boy; I only wonder at you. Some go for quality, some for quantity; suit yourself," said Alice.

"Where did you ride?" asked Nettie.

"Along the shore road toward Naples, then turned to the right, and, oh, the dearest old woman came to the door of her cottage; she was as ugly as she could be, but had such a pleasant face. She said something and Gennaro said it was, 'may the saints bless your

pretty faces,' so we nodded and smiled, and said, 'thank you.' The people are so good," answered Kate.

"Signora," said Gennaro, "the boat is ready now if the signora pleases."

"Will, shall he carry you?" asked Alice.

"Shut up, Alice, you're real mean. I hope you'll be hungry sometime."

"Will you divide with me, then?" she retorted.

"No one will have want," said Gennaro, who supposed there was some reference to possible famine. "I have prepared much luncheon, chicken, much mandarins, all that is needed. We remain the night in Capri."

"Yes, yes, come everybody. I wonder if that tall man will be there. Let that basket alone, Will."

"I only want to be sure there are two chickens. Lunch is the best part of the rum old temples."

"We are going to a cave, you silly boy," said Nettie, as they left the room.

"I shouldn't wonder if a temple was stowed away in it somewhere. Of all tiresome sights those everlasting ruins are the tiresomest."

"These intelligent remarks, and high-toned sentiments of my cousin are most elevating," said Alice, running after Will, who was racing down the hill. These two were kindred spirits, continually called to order by Nettie, who now exclaimed, "Oh, Alice."

"Nonsense, my dear, you do dignity enough for us all. I sympathize with Will. He and I wore the yoke in our youth."

"Rather a light yoke, what with ghosts and ghouls," returned Nettie, laughing at the flying figures.

"Oh, did you ever see a ghost? Did anybody?" asked Kate.

"Nobody, ever," replied Nettie, with decision. "Here we are," as the boat was reached, and fairly in-

toxicated with pleasure they stowed themselves in it, and bounded over the waves.

"Down with your heads," called Will, who was in the habit of "doing" Gennaro's words into English. Then the Blue Grotto! Such screams of delight, such expressions of wonder, made the stolid oarsmen smile in half derision, while the more sympathetic rocks echoed their joyful words.

"Let us have a song," said Alice. "Is there any other boat in the grotto?" asked the lady who did the dignified.

"I have believe not," answered Gennaro.

"Go it," said Will.

Then "God save the Queen" was sung with a hearty good will, but at the end of the last verse, to the consternation of the head of the party, a grand bass voice joined with them, followed by an applause as of a dozen claquers.

Dead silence from the singers.

"I ask the signora's pardon," said Gennaro, in distress. "I did not to see."

"I am sorry," said Nettie, in a low voice. "Alice, do speak quietly."

The other boat kept out of the possibility of recognition; only a dark object could be distinguished.

"Like a dead whale floating," said Alice.

"Alice, *please* be quiet."

"My dear, I cannot. There is something in the air, or in the independence, that I cannot repress."

Nettie sighed resignedly, determined not to speak again. The idea of drawing attention to a party such as theirs made her very uncomfortable. The irrepressibles alternated between whispers and bursts of laughter, while Gennaro went on as usual with his descriptions and guide-book explanations.

Somehow the semi-darkness, the weird, blue light, and the boat in the distance exactly behind them, disposed Nettie more to reverie than talk. She often longed for quiet sympathy. So much that they saw teemed with a life of bygone centuries, so much was surrounded by a very atmosphere of thought, that it was often a struggle to join in the perpetual fun of her cousin, who had but little respect for antiquity, and who saw in a ruin only its picturesqueness. Nettie would often start suddenly when expected to answer some new outburst of nonsense, and wonder what Alice meant by exclaiming, "Raythe a sudden pull up, Samivel."

She had never entirely recovered from the ghostly pranks of her cousin, and the presence of the unseen singer, hidden in the dark shadows of the cave, made her nervous again.

"I cannot endure this any longer," she said. "We must go out into the air."

"What has happened, Nettie? I thought you had given up being nervous."

"No matter what I am. Hasten Gennaro."

"Si, signora;" but as the boat turned toward the entrance, the steady fall of oars was heard following them.

"Quick," exclaimed Nettie; "pay them, Gennaro."

A few words from Gennaro sent the boat swiftly through the opening, and Nettie's color returned. "Land as soon as possible, and pray don't call any more attention to us," she said, addressing everybody.

Will signified assent by putting his finger on his lips, and looking severely at his cousin, who was trying to keep from laughing.

"If you will be good, Cousin Alice," he said, in a loud whisper, "I'll bring you again some day when she is taking a nap."

"I'd thank you if I dared to speak," whispered Alice.

"You may come and spend a week if you will only let me get to dry land now," returned Nettie, half crying.

They landed before the other boat came in sight. It had evidently been farther behind than they supposed amid the uncertain lights and echoes of the cave, so that they were on their way to the hotel before it reached the shore. Comfortable rooms were ready for them, but before thinking of refreshment they stood transfixed on the terrace of the Tibére, gazing on the superb view from that point: the oriental-looking village, surrounded with hills, each bearing a ruined memory; the steep descent to the bay, terraced with vineyards and rich with orange groves; the blue water, so clear that another world seemed imprisoned beneath its crystal surface. The mountainous surroundings, with the mysterious smoke of Vesuvius, formed a picture that arrested even the versatile mind of Alice. One backward vision rose in Nettie's heart. Henry had written to her of these very scenes. Where was the lover of her girlhood? Where was the one who, though young, had never failed to give some aspiration to her thoughts, to add to life a deeper meaning than seemed possible in its prosaic passing? She misjudged herself when she felt that the years of her separation from him were wasted for

> "Sorrow, whose employ
> Was to develop, not destroy,
> Proved better than a barren joy."

"When that reverie is over, my dear," remarked Alice, "please tell me what was amiss with you in the grotto?"

"I hardly know. The air oppressed me from the

first. The blue light dazed me, and reminded me of the horrible fright you gave me on the ghost night. Then that voice in the darkness. I would have shrieked or fainted if we had remained much longer."

"It was best to come out, of course, and I ought to be perpetually punished for the injury I have done you. It will be long before I forgive myself. But, Nettie, the singer was only some other visitor like ourselves. It was hideous in him to join our song. The wrong was his, not ours. Try, dear, not to be so sensitive about little things. Perhaps he is the tall man again."

"I sincerely hope not, after that Vesuvius affair, and I trust we will never meet him again. He was silly to go down that crater. It was not the least like an Englishman."

"Gennaro is good on nationalities, he calls him the English Milor. However, we will probably never meet him again. I am going out; I suppose one may walk alone?"

"Get some mandarins," said Nettie.

"I think so. Will ate twenty-four to my certain knowledge, yesterday. You really give him too much money."

"If he were not so perfectly well, I would limit him, but I want him to enjoy every moment, and my idea of enjoyment is liberty."

"You ought to go to the States; isn't it there they make such a fuss about liberty, and had slaves to prove their belief in it? What an inconsistent nation that transatlantic tribe is!"

Nettie sighed as the thought of Henry came again to her, whereupon Alice hastened to change the subject, for with all her lightheartedness she watched Nettie with a tender love. Her way of doing this was by remarking, "Isn't it jolly?"

"What?" asked Nettie as they were going to their rooms.

"Everything; I only know one thing better. I would like to have been born old Cowell's widow, with two children like Will and Kate."

Nettie laughed heartily.

"A crape veil on my cradle would have been a nuisance, certainly, but I would have outgrown it."

"You would have made short work of it," laughed Nettie.

"True, so I would. I am content, you give me all I need, and what I don't need I buy with my own income; don't 'income' sound grand?"

"Very; you'd better not speak about it; some one will fall in love with your money. What is coming? Is it a hurricane?"

"Oh, Nettie," exclaimed Will, rushing in, "it was that tall man after all; he came in the boat after us, and I said, 'Bless me, it's the same fellow again.'" He stopped to take breath.

"Then he said," added Kate, "'Are you speaking of me, my boy?'"

"Oh, children!" exclaimed Nettie. Alice was laughing but asked, "What next?"

"Why I said that sister thought he died in the crater; then he said, 'What is your sister's name?' and when I said Mrs. Gregory, he looked vexed, and marched off to his boat."

"Yet he kept looking back at us, and once stopped and turned around as if he were coming back; his face seemed to be asking something about us," said Kate.

"I am glad he has gone; pray don't say any more about him. There is Gennaro with a carriage; come, give up your walk, Alice, and we will explore; perhaps Will may rejoice in few more ruins."

EXEUNT.

CHAPTER XXI.

ALTHOUGH Capri proved very attractive, they were glad to return to the quaint hotel at Sorrento, under the care of the good-natured brothers, who never seemed better pleased than when ministering to the wants of their guests. The house is built upon a rock which rises sheer out of the sea. Their rooms were on its edge. Looking out of the windows they saw only the water, for the rock was a straight and solid wall beneath them. The sea beat in steady throbs against this Titan foundation. The last room of their suite was chosen by Will, because, as he said, "It is too dreary for women, and has a ruffianly banditti expression." This was because of a mysterious door that could not possibly open into anything but the air, and which was fastened securely. This door occupied much of his thoughts; however, he kept much of his own counsel, until he discovered that it did not open outside. His was the last room, that was certain; a comparison of the inside and outside windows proved this. The door was inside only. This naturally suggested an opening into the wall. Alice was taken into his confidence; she declared she would have nothing to do with mysteries—that it was probably a closet. "Why is it so barred and bolted, then?" asked Will.

"Nonsense, it's a preserve closet."

"Don't be ridiculous, Alice. The fastenings are on the inside, even the bars are secured by a lock."

This looked more serious. Alice puckered up her forehead, and proposed calling one of the brothers to settle it at once. "Nettie and Kate are out; see if Stephano will come," she said.

Stephano came. He first made them promise that the little sister should not be trusted there, then with one wonderful key introduced upside down for one bolt, sideways for another, the handle first for a third, the bars yielded; a circular, narrow staircase was disclosed cut in the solid rock, and which, as Will delightedly exclaimed, "Lands you square in the Mediterranean Sea!"

He and Alice crept down, and peered out of a sort of irregular door into the water, and listened to fascinating stories of mysterious robberies and murders that these steps had concealed.

"A heavy piece of furniture stood against the door," said Stephano, "when we bought the place; we thought the bars were sufficient protection. Such things do not happen now," then he added reflectively, "so often."

"It will never do to tell Nettie; she will be fancying I may wander down in my sleep, or that some wretches may creep up and murder us. However, if she don't treat us well, we can escape here, or, by the by, Alice, you can elope with Mr. Selwyn, or drown yourself if he never comes again, I'll never——"

What Will would never do, did not appear, for he fled before his cousin's upraised hand, an opportunity seized by the careful Stephano to fasten his bolts again. "That is right," said Alice, returning, after vainly trying to catch Will; "fasten it up. It's awfully uncanny, and don't tell the signora about it."

The signora and Kate were seen then, entering the gate. They lingered in the garden, among its orange-trees and arbors. The little donkeys coming and

going, as needed or dismissed by the guests, were Kate's especial delight. She was never tired of making the docile creatures happy by praising and patting them. They soon learned to look for her, and gave many a boisterous concert when she came in sight. After the Capri excursion, Nettie only took short walks, preferring to rest in her comfortable chair, by the window, where she could indulge in perpetual reveries. "Henry, Henry," was the burden of her thoughts. His letter was impressed upon her memory ; there was no need to take it out ; she knew every loving word, but where was the writer ? Had he forgotten ?

"Oh, Nettie," exclaimed Kate, rushing in at the door as Will and Alice came in through a window, "that tall man has taken rooms here with that English party ; they are taking an early dinner together."

"My dear Kate, I cannot allow this sort of gossip. We have no interest in the tall man ; you must not take notice of other people and their affairs ; it is shockingly bad taste. Be as happy as you can with us, remember to make no acquaintances, although if you are spoken to, you must reply civilly, but not in a way to encourage conversation."

Kate was subdued, but she and Will had a wonderful desire to know everything about everybody, considering this sort of intelligence much more interesting than the quotations from Murray to which Nettie treated them occasionally. Alice was quite willing to listen to their items of information, most of which were gathered from Gennaro. This faithful servant watched every English party, found out exactly what they ordered, and forthwith proceeded to add whatever had been before omitted in the *menu* of his signora, whom he thought the most beautiful and most grand of any English lady he had yet seen. His responsibility was

great, for he wished to make her and her party perfectly comfortable and perfectly happy.

As for Nettie herself, she enjoyed their life in a subdued way, but the others were so full of spirits it was almost impossible to keep them within bounds, and now this ubiquitous "tall man" added to her cares. She wished he had not come to their hotel; it was so vexatious to have the conscious feeling that she had about him. "What are you thinking of, Nettie? Come, let us have a walk; we want to go to that view, don't you know, that Gennaro told us of," said Will.

"Yes," replied Nettie; "it's a good time, while he is at dinner."

"He! Who? Gennaro?" asked Alice.

"No, nobody; I was thinking of something else. How the sun glares to-day. Put on your veil, Kate; I have a lovely, thick blue one."

"And most hideous you look under it," remarked Alice, who was fully emancipated from such minor considerations as complexions. "I love the sunlight."

"So does Mr. Selwyn," said Will, escaping by the window again.

Kate chose to go on one of the donkeys; the rest preferred to walk.

"Take us somewhere where we will be alone," whispered Nettie to Gennaro, hoping for once to have the comfort of letting her irrepressibles have full enjoyment of both limbs and tongues.

Kate, who thought there was no happiness to equal a ride on a donkey, had gone ahead. Gennaro hovered around the signora; Alice and Will were having some argument, so that Nettie was the only listener to the occasional descriptions that Gennaro thought it his duty to give. Presently Kate was discovered in a controversy with her donkey. He refused to go another

step. She patted and petted, and called him loving names, but no—his legs, straightened out in the most determined manner, proved him as adamant to all her cajolery. "He is only tired," she explained to Nettie, as her sister came up to her; "go on, I will come when he is rested." Kate seemed as much at home on the little animal as on her feet; Gennaro saw no danger, so Nettie walked on with her guide, seeing Will and Alice far ahead.

"Is this the shortest way, Gennaro?" she asked. "It is rather steep."

"No, my lady; there is a road more easy, but more of public disposition. I came this for the alone."

Nettie could see Alice going towards the cliff, from where they were to have the view. Will seemed to have been attracted in another direction. Suddenly she saw a tall figure loom up against the sky.

"I think I will not go any further," she said. "I will wait here; tell the signorita to return."

A sudden scream alarmed her, and turning she saw Kate's donkey on a full run, Kate clinging to his neck and screaming at the top of her voice. They seemed to fly past her, and toward the cliff! Gennaro ran after them, and Nettie, paralyzed with terror, knew she was watching to see Kate bound into the sea! Two figures were also watching: Alice and the tall man. "Oh, can they stop him?" exclaimed Nettie, powerless to help, but unable to turn away.

The moment of terror was almost sublime, but that tandem team of sublime and ridiculous seemed to lead Nettie's party, for at the exact moment that the donkey was ready to rush to certain death, the strong figure who was thus to gain Nettie's eternal gratitude received the shock, and although almost prostrated by the blow, succeeded in holding the frightened creature

and catching Kate, while Alice, having made a rush for the donkey's tail, would inevitably have pulled it out, if her tall friend had not been holding the other end so firmly.

Nettie laughed hysterically—Kate was safe; but on the cliff, clearly projected against the pale blue sky, was the absurd picture—the donkey held at both ends, Alice leaning back pulling his tail, the tall man clasping his neck with one hand, and holding Kate by the other. It was over in a moment. Gennaro and Will appeared on the scene; Nettie sat down by the roadside, laughing and crying, too much overcome to go farther. Presently they all came down to her, except the rescuer, who very properly effaced himself at once, touching his hat, and expressing his gratification at having been of service. He remained to gaze at the view. After this there was nothing to do but to go home and talk it over. Kate was well frightened, and Nettie held fast to her hand. Alice and Will gave an immense deal of advice about the management of donkeys in general. Will added that he thought their tall friend a great comfort. "He pops up so conveniently; really, I feel as if he were watching us."

"Don't," said Nettie; "I suppose I must thank him."

"I did all that," said Alice; "you need have no trouble about it; just get composed again."

"You looked so ridiculous by that donkey," said Nettie, laughing again. "How *could* you seize his tail?"

"There was no other available handle that I saw," said Alice; "and in such an emergency one could not wait to choose."

They were entering the garden, and all the brothers came out to express regret, and to threaten condign punishment on the perverse beast, but Kate insisted on

his being forgiven. "He didn't know there was a cliff with the sea underneath. Of course, he wouldn't have gone there if he did. Promise you won't punish him." And they promised, as they would to have rewarded him with an extra dinner if she had asked it.

In the afternoon they all went to drive but Nettie, and when they came home were full of a moonlight excursion, that Gennaro proposed, "to see the moon rise right out of the water. Nettie," explained Kate, "you must come, and we will have a real jolly time."

But Nettie would not go. She said she wanted to be quiet. "Perhaps I will go to bed before you return; so don't hurry; the moon will be superb to-night, and if as fine to-morrow, perhaps we can go out on the water. Gennaro says the boats are all engaged for this evening."

They left her to her quiet evening. *Ten o'clock*, and she was still gazing over the sea. Many boats and many voices made the scene bright with life. *Eleven o'clock.* "Why do they not return!" She began to be anxious. She went out in the garden; a few loungers were about; she could not stay there. She walked up and down their long range of rooms; the lamps were not lighted; she had opened every window to the silver light of the moon. *Twelve o'clock.* No sign of the party; certainly a noise in Will's room. She entered. No one was there; but a voice, oh, such a familiar voice; deeper and more manly than when she heard it last. But was it a dream! Where did it come from? The words were very matter of fact—not at all ghostly: "I really cannot tell where they go. It is dark, and there seems to be a door. Come up if you like, but be careful, the steps are narrow."

"Henry!" she tried to call. The words died without sound. "Oh, where is he!" But only in her

heart were the words heard. She heard him laugh, and other voices spoke. "We had better go back," some one said; "we may be pitched down if we are found out." Then he said, "You go first; be careful in getting in the boat." The sounds died away; she heard oars, and that was all.

In a few moments the party returned. Nettie was found in a dead faint near the barred and bolted door of Will's room.

CHAPTER XXII.

THIS catastrophe sobered the party greatly. Nettie confided the strange occurrence to Alice, who forthwith held a conference with her "*familiar*," Will, a light having suddenly dawned upon her, which she did not dare to flash upon Nettie until she was sure of its truth.

"Will, go at once and find out the name of that man whom we meet wherever we go. Why did we never think about that part of him? he must have a name, and Nettie is sure she heard Henry's voice the other side of the door in your room. I had to tell her about the steps down to the water, to explain it."

"Whew!" said Will. "I wonder if he is the long-lost lover. His voice always sounded to me like one I had heard before, but I don't remember him at all. I'll find out his name." In a few minutes he returned, having met Gennaro in the garden. "Signor Massoni, he left for Pæstum this morning early."

"Massoni! that's not Mason anyway. Is he an Italian? Gennaro always called him the English Milor."

"I know no more than you do. Massoni may be Italian for Mason, but they don't sound enough alike to say anything to Nettie. Then, Alice, there's a real stunning girl in his party, and we had better not pitch into him till we know what she may be."

"I haven't the faintest idea of pitching into anybody, you absurd boy. No; we must let events take care of themselves, and as soon as Nettie is able we will go off

somewhere and try to make her forget the mysterious voice."

This did not prove possible. Nettie would not yield an inch. She had heard Henry speak. He was on the other side of that door, and that was the end of it.

They stayed a week longer in Sorrento, and then, followed by kind wishes and blessings from all, they went to Salerno, and thence to Amalfi. The drive was thoroughly enjoyed. It must be a hard and worldly heart that can resist the influences of that superb winding road. Mountains terraced with vineyards on one side, the blue Mediterranean on the other, a new phase of beauty at every turn, make a scene of fascination that even the Cornishe cannot equal.

At last, after having exhausted every adjective in their own language, and having made a raid into both French and Italian, they reached the odd little Hotel, perched on a high rock, and which in its neatness and comfort deserves praise as high as its situation. The young people were, as usual, wild with delight, and with Alice explored every possible point of interest, and every old church, and all the manufactories, being especially delighted with that of maccaroni, which they assured Nettie was not nearly as bad as they expected. "They do throw heaps of it over their shoulders, and so on, but it's great fun to see them sit on the bar that kneads it, and hop around the heap of paste."

Nothing interested Nettie as it had done at first; she listened to all they said, and tried to show her pleasure, but her heart was with her lover, "and he was far away." That he could love any but her had not occurred to her trusting heart. One day she found her way to the terrace of the old Capuchin convent on the high land above Amalfi, and having once been there, she went every day. The view of the sunset from that position

is something marvellous. Mountains rising on one side, the sea on the other, between them head-lands of majestic rocks, groves of citron and oranges, all golden in the level beams of the sinking light. It was a picture to be indelibly impressed upon her memory. Her heart grew thankful as she saw this beautiful world, disfigured only by sin. She dreamed of great reformations to be wrought, of much good that she might do—for the wealth that Mr. Cowell had left to her she held as a responsibility to be used for the good of others. The sunlight was to her a type of the spreading of the light of the greater Sun of Righteousness, under whose beams all nature would at last be glorified, and all beings acknowledge His power. One evening she sent Gennaro away, and was leaning against a vine-clad pillar. "I want a whole hour here alone," she told him, and the faithful servant contentedly sat on a stone far out of sight, but where he could know if danger threatened his Signora. Presently the intense stillness was broken by a step. She did not turn, but exclaimed:

"O Gennaro, I cannot come yet, it is too beautiful."

No Gennaro answered, but in a moment Nettie was folded in the strong arms of her lover, and her beautiful head lay upon his shoulder, and her lovely eyes rested on his. Such meetings are among the indescribable. He thought he recognized her voice in the cave, but she was "Mrs. Gregory;" he never could catch a glimpse of her face, the dark hair and her blue veil destroyed any likeness, so that he gave up any thought of the party he so often met, as being a possible clew to the object of his search. He had just reached Amalfi, alone, having left the friends whom he accidentally joined, and hearing of the superb view from the convent walked there to see it. He was greeted by the voice whose every tone was music to him. That was

all. The story was repeated many times on both sides. He explained his researches on the stone stairs. The party were on a moonlight sail, they discovered the stairs, and insisted on exploring them.

"And you heard me! you, my darling!"

But I will not break my resolution; they shall have that sacred hour to themselves.

Presently Gennaro, who saw the English Milor go up to the terrace, thought it about time to look after the signora, who never seemed to wish to meet any stranger, so, in his usual, noiseless way, he glided to the point where he had left his lady.

What was his consternation—I may say his utter annihilation—when, standing with their backs to him, and gazing on the surging sea, were the two whom he supposed to be strangers in—well—in one of those positions natural to lovers, his arm supporting her, and she leaning upon him. A strange inability to stand alone always seizes upon lovers, especially of the suddenly reunited order, and this case was no exception. Gennaro glided back again. He sat down upon the cold stone, and tried to gain a solution of this mystery. They could not have formed an acquaintance, which ripened into love, and reached this culmination, in a half hour. "No," Gennaro felt, as he would have explained it, "in his interior," that "they must have known each other before, quarrelled, perhaps, and now all was right. Right——" but would the beautiful signora, whose voice was music, go home with the English Milor, and cease to need the protection of her servant, Gennaro? That view of the case was too much for him. She did not need him now, that was very evident; and as she did not know of his faithful watch, he went slowly down the hill, trying to be glad that the signora was happy. A loud greeting from Will, and the

usual sounds of merriment from the three, who were not anxious on the subject of dignity, roused him.

"Where is Mrs. Gregory?" exclaimed her brother. "Is she never coming home?"

"I fear she will be late," sighed Gennaro.

"What on earth has happened to her; you look like a ghost, Gennaro?"

"A strange thing;" he replied; "this English Milor has spoken to my lady, they are friends, they need me no more, they are on the terrace of the convent, they gaze upon the sea."

Will simply shouted—I have no more elegant word by which to explain his condition. He sat down by the roadside. "'They gaze upon the sea!' Oh, that is too delicious! Alice, he is Henry after all. 'They gaze upon the sea,' yes, and they will gaze till the sea is dark with night unless some one goes after them."

Gennaro was more amazed than ever; what was so amusing in the situation? He had carefully suppressed the particulars, and thought his explanation could not be improved. He had to wait until they had all laughed till they could laugh no more, then Alice told him that this Signor Massoni had been trying to find the signora, whom he loved, but it must have been the thick veil she wore that prevented his recognizing her; evidently they had discovered each other now.

"Evidently, signorita," said Gennaro, with a sigh, all the way from his boots, thinking how very evident it had been to him.

"Shall I go after them, Alice?" asked Will.

"By no means; let them have the full enjoyment of it all. He is big enough to take care of her."

"Only think, Will, how we have met and dodged that man. It's Nettie's own fault; she was always rushing away whenever he came in sight. What next, I wonder?"

"A wedding, but let us fight to keep on with our journey. Won't they be spooney and horrid? Nettie deserves some happiness, after all, and I'll try not to bully her."

"You'll have your head taken off if you do, I promise you," remarked Alice, who was returning to the hotel, while Kate was speechless with wonder.

"Is he the man that caught the donkey?" she asked.

"The very same; the one who saved the donkey's tail from being pulled out."

"Or you from being pulled into the sea," said Will.

"Is he going to marry sister Nettie?"

"I presume so," replied Alice.

Gennaro *presumed so*, too, but said no more. They were somewhat sobered by this time, and sat quietly on the little stone piazza of the hotel, and also gazed upon the sea.

Presently Will exclaimed, "There is no law about our not having something to eat, is there?"

"No," said Alice, reflectively; "they need us no more."

"Fudge!" said Will. "They'll spoon a while, and then come to common sense and loving relatives again. Bring everything that there is to eat, Gennaro; I'm hungrier than ever."

The table was set outside, as usual; the snowy cloth was covered with all sorts of tempting dishes, a lamp revealed their variety, while the stars twinkled and winkled their appreciation of the situation. In the midst of the feast, the low voices of the lovers were heard.

"Stand from under," said Will; then, according to their usual style, they all made a rush. "Oh, Nettie, to think that he is Henry!"

"Please introduce me in proper form," said Alice.

"Are you old Henry?" asked Kate.

Nettie was utterly amazed; she had no idea that any human being knew of the reunion. It was Henry's turn to laugh, and to cover the confusion of his beloved. He was master of the situation, and before long, explanations were made, and the party were comfortably enjoying the supper which Gennaro had ordered.

How bright the stars were that night! How clear the air was! How musically the waves beat time upon the shore!

O Happiness, thou golden goddess! Art thou, too, an alchemist?

CHAPTER XXIII.

HERE the story might end, but there are a few more incidents connected with this party, two of whom were late that night before they left the little terrace porch of the Amalfi Hotel. Nettie was not permitted to leave that rocky eyrie until she promised that then and there, so soon as Henry's friends could join them, she would fulfil her promise and be his wife.

"There is nothing to wait for, you know, my darling, and my friend, being a clergyman, shows it is regularly written that he came for the very purpose. He can be here on Thursday—no, I am sure he can come to-morrow afternoon, if I send in the morning early. Salerno is not very far ; then we can be married in the evening."

"It rather takes my breath away. Why must it be so very soon ?" whispered Nettie. She did not need to do more than whisper, for Henry was not *very* far off.

"If you can tell me, why not ? I will waste time in explanations." But Nettie's answer was not ready. They had too much to talk about to "waste time," as Henry said, "in explanations," therefore such minor affairs were deferred, and the following day was passed by all, excepting those the most concerned, in preparations for the evening festivities. The vettura was sent early to Salerno, after which the bride and groom elect disappeared. There were sunny glades and rocky seats that sufficed for them, until the prosaic nature of hunger drove them home. Gennaro's duties were heavy that day. What with continual feasting, and the decorations

that his Italian nature and his love for the signora made necessary, he was hourly running to and fro with fruits and flowers, and whatever of fish, flesh, or fowl the land or sea could be induced to give. Under his directions the hotel became a bower of beauty. The porch, or terrace was enclosed with vines, and hung with colored lamps. There Alice proposed that the ceremony should be held, while the few guests could both see and hear from the long windows that opened upon it. The supper-table was laid inside, and prepared for their party of five, with Henry's friends, Rev. and Mrs. Clerc, and their daughter, making eight. There was no opportunity for elaborate toilettes, and yet Alice and Kate surprised Nettie by inventing quite a creditable wedding gown for her, by covering a plain white silk with a lace shawl, for drapery. The lace was looped with some of the flowers that Gennaro offered for the purpose, and when at last Nettie was robed for the "sacrifice," as Will called it, certainly Amâlfi had never seen a fairer bride. The Clerc family came by six o'clock, and were profuse in wonder and congratulations. The "stunning girl" fell to Will's share, and was highly appreciated by that susceptible youth, while Alice would have been in danger of neglect, but for a very delightful circumstance, one of those nice things that so rarely happen in real life. This executive young woman first attended to the beautifying of her much-loved Nettie, and saw that each brown curl was in its proper place, and every flower and fold was fulfilling its mission. She then patted and smoothed Kate into position, surveying them both with much approval. While she was bestowing admiration and kisses *ad libitum*, the ubiquitous Gennaro presented a card on the silver waiter which Will said he kept in his pocket.

"Of all delicious surprises!" exclaimed Alice, who

always said she was glad when she felt so; "see, Nettie —Mr. Selwyn!" and off she ran to welcome their old friend, and to amaze and bewilder him with the astonishing air of festivity pervading the house.

"You are just in time; get into your dress coat in five minutes, and come directly down again. The ceremony will not be till nine—no, not a word, you and I can talk to-morrow. It will be prosy enough then;" and that he might not delay, Alice left him to obey his commanding general with what speed he could. Henry was hovering about to catch Alice. "I must see Nettie first," he said. "I want to have one look now, before the others come. I *must*, Alice."

"Oh, certainly, anything for peace; only, if you disarrange a flower or a fold, I will take an hour more."

This tremendous threat began his subjugation; the vision of beauty before him completed it. He stood speechless and gazed. "That will do," said Alice, who saw Nettie's lip quiver; "go now, and wait in the opposite room till you are called; I have to scramble into my gown." Henry obeyed without a word; Nettie turned to the window, feeling strangely, as if it were all a dream; a voice attracted her; Alice, quickly robed, was talking emphatically in the corridor.

"I will *not*," she said. "She shall go off without any anxiety. Do be patient."

"Haven't I been patient? What more can you ask? We will see to Will and Kate all the same. It would be such a delightful surprise."

"Do let me alone this one evening. I cannot—I cannot, do believe me."

"What is it, Alice?" asked Nettie. "Don't let me prevent anything."

"It's only some folly of Mr. Selwyn's," she replied, wisely, closing the door. "He wants me to recite a

dialogue with him. Such nonsense, and so inappropriate! Men are such idiots. Now, dear, it is time. One more kiss, you beautiful darling, before I give you up."

"We will be just the same to each other, dear," replied Nettie.

"In heart, yes—but come." Henry met them; the few guests were collected; all the household were present; Kate stood beside her sister, under the flowery canopy, while, with a deep solemnity, the Rev. Mr. Clerc united these long-separated, faithful souls.

Congratulations followed, according to the usual programme, and all was bright and cheerful, excepting that Gennaro actually broke down and fled from the room in a paroxysm of sobs.

He reappeared at supper-time, endeavoring to atone by his increased attentions, and after the signora intrusted her cousin, with her brother and sister, to his care, until they should meet in Rome, he succeeded in reproducing his calm and quiet manner.

The bride and groom left Amalfi the next morning, planning to rejoin the party before Christmas in Rome. Alice promised to take charge of her young cousins, giving a side-glance at Will, as she assumed this burden, at which he remarked, "I'd like to see you do it." There was no time for more; the vettura drove off.

"The end of it all being a sight of the back of Nettie's hat," said Master Stepney.

"Now," said Mr. Selwyn, "I have a little something to propose before the decorations are taken down. Will you, Mr. Clerc, do the same favor for Miss Stainer and for me that you have done for those who have gone?"

Surprise and silence fell upon the party. Even Will only exclaimed, "Hallo!"

Alice meekly took her place, and a second marriage ceremony was performed. The affair was so sudden that for a few moments not a word was spoken. Then Will looked around with an expectant air.

"Next; pass 'em on."

Gennaro improvised a second breakfast, during which they all accommodated themselves to the new circumstances, and were as merry a party as if they had passed months in preparation. They concluded to remain together, and continue their journey in company until they rejoined Mr. and Mrs. Mason. Pæstum and Sicily were yet to be visited, and before leaving Amalfi, the Clerc party were to be shown its sights. "I'll show them," volunteered Will; "Mr. Selwyn can go under Alice's charge, instead of me," which arrangement showed the wisdom of Signorino Stepperni, for the plan worked admirably. Alice explained Amalfi to her husband, from the terrace of the convent, where they passed many whole days. Sometimes Gennaro took their luncheon to them there.

This good courier ascribed these hasty weddings to some peculiarity of nationality, and wondered greatly at all that had occurred. There was something unreal about it all.

"Like an earthquake," he said, reflectively.

THE END.

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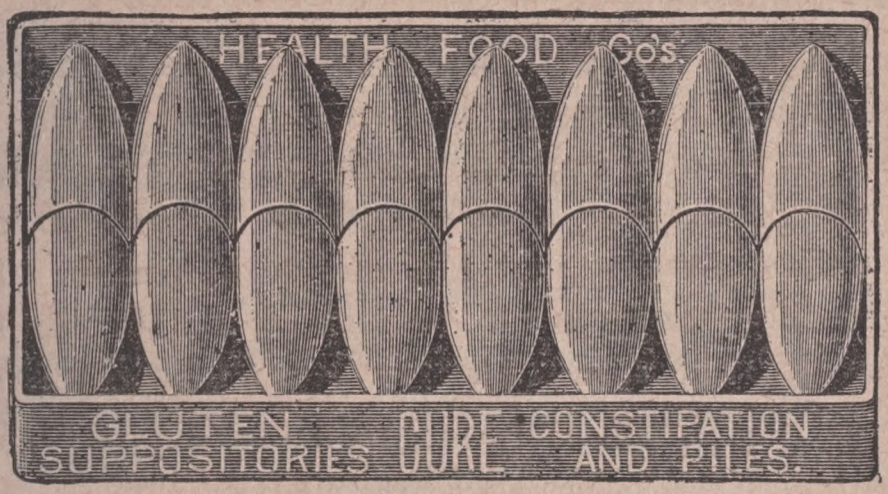

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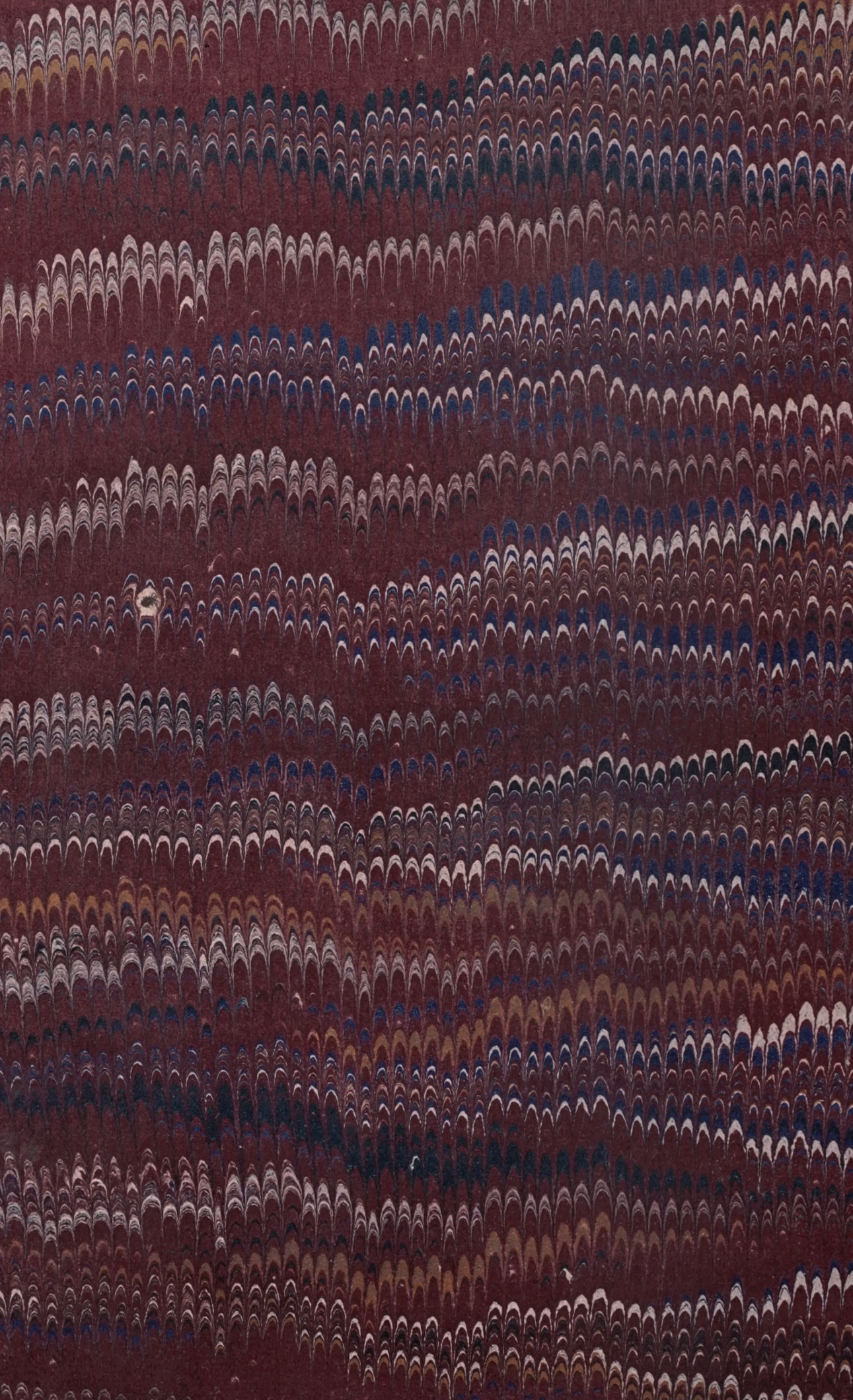

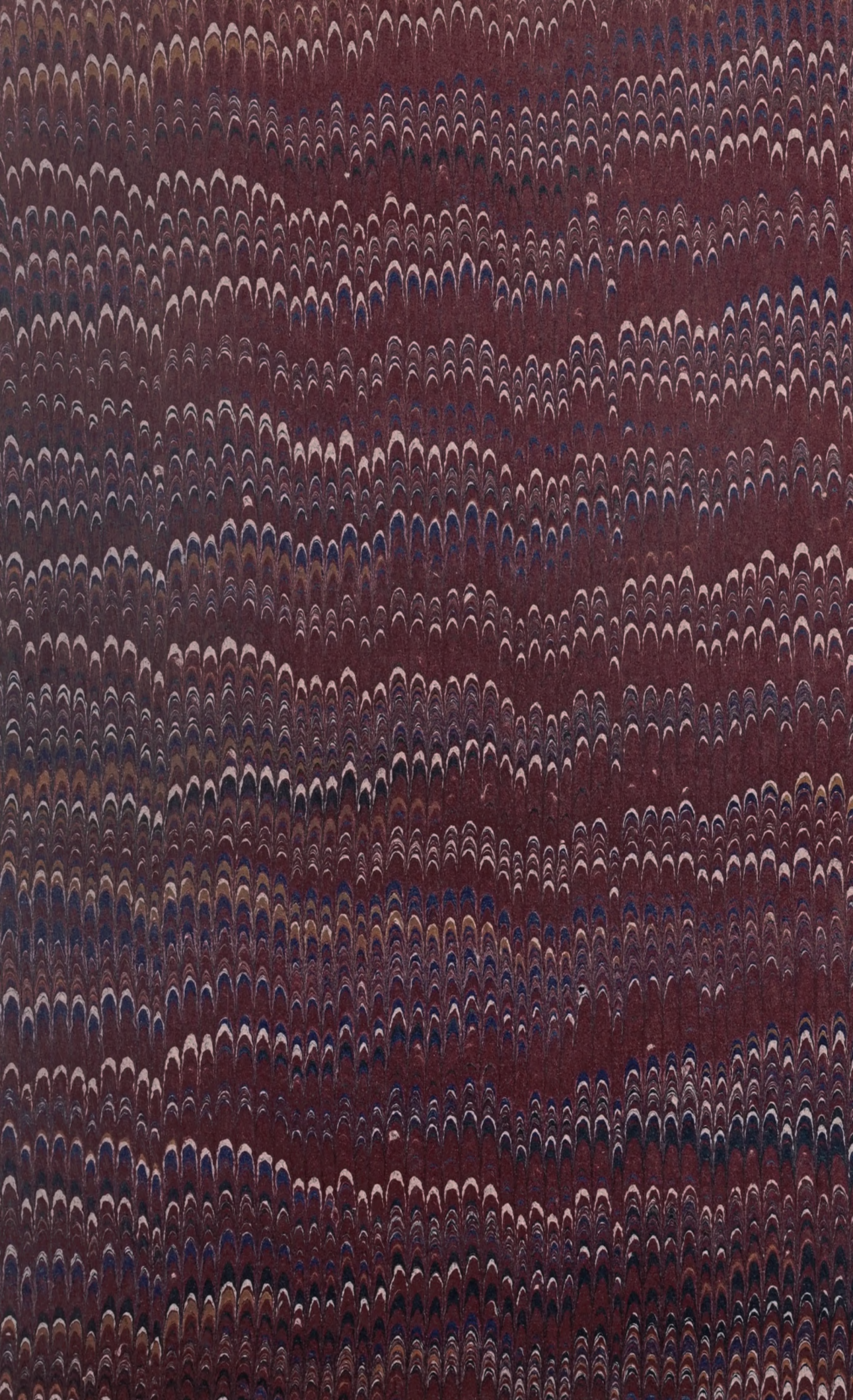

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